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Michelle Anne Parsons Date

Death and Freedom in Post-Soviet Russia:
An Ethnography of a Mortality Crisis

By

Michelle Anne Parsons
Doctor of Philosophy

Anthropology

____
Peter J. Brown
Advisor

____
Chikako Ozawa-de Silva
Committee Member

____
Carol Worthman
Committee Member

Accepted:

____
Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

____
Date

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By

Michelle Anne Parsons
B.A., Stanford University, 1995
M.S., Harvard University, 2000

Advisor: Peter J. Brown, Ph.D.

An abstract of
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James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

Death and Freedom in Post-Soviet Russia: An Ethnography of a Mortality Crisis
By Michelle Anne Parsons

In the early 1990s Russia experienced the most rapid decline of life expectancy in modern history. In a five year period male life expectancy dropped by six years; female life expectancy dropped by three years. Surprisingly, the most severe increases in mortality took place among the middle-aged in Moscow. Drawing on 13 months of fieldwork in the capital city, this dissertation brings ethnography to bear on a topic that has, until recently, been the province of epidemiology and sociology.

Economic "shock therapy" and the collapse of Soviet industry undermined social relations. Middle-aged Muscovites express this as being "unneeded" (*ne nuzhny*), or having nothing to offer others. Being "unneeded" was a form of disempowerment. Western literature identifies a lack of social capital as a risk factor for poor health and mortality during and after the transition, but lack of social capital is seen as a Soviet legacy rather than a legacy of neoliberal economic reforms. Alcohol consumption is treated as a means of escape when it was often a tragic attempt to reconnect with others. At the same time, alcohol-related deaths, along with violent and accidental deaths, were a consequence of a lack of social limits. Russian men push against social limits; when these limits were lacking this sometimes proved deadly.

Russians' paradoxical desire for space and order opens a window on Soviet social relations. The "generation of victors," born around the Great Patriotic War (WWII) were enculturated into ethics of collective sacrifice and socially-useful work. These ethics informed social practices organized through work and social position vis-à-vis the state. In Moscow, work was the nexus of state order and space. Within the constraints of order, Muscovites found space (*prostor*), a concept related to spiritual expanse, spontaneous emotion, and freedom (*svoboda*).

In Russian culture, the individual experience of freedom (*svoboda*) is possible through constraint. The demise of certain social constraints therefore hindered freedom, especially among middle-aged Muscovites, even at the very moment the West celebrated its triumph.

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This dissertation would not be possible without the many eloquent Russians who took time to talk with me, sharing their stories. In some cases I was little more than a stranger. They welcomed me into their homes, answered my questions with patience, served me food and tea, and shared their thoughts and experiences. If this dissertation conveys a sense of how certain Russians experienced the early 1990s, it is because of the openness and kindness of those same Russians.

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Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction 1

Chapter 2. Mortality 14

Chapter 3. Methods 44

Chapter 4. Paradox 60

Chapter 5. Moscow 76

Chapter 6: War 93

Chapter 7. Work 117

Chapter 8. Shock 145

Chapter 9. Death of Society 172

Chapter 10. Freedom 189

Chapter 11. Conclusion 203

References 214

Illustrations

Figures

1. Male life expectancies at birth, selected Eastern European countries, Russian Federation, United States, and France, 1960-2008. 16

2. Female life expectancies at birth, selected Eastern European countries, Russian Federation, United States, and France, 1960-2008. 16

3. Male life expectancies at birth, selected former Soviet Union countries, 1960-2008. 18

4. Female life expectancies at birth, selected former Soviet Union countries, 1960-2008. 18

5. Male and female adult (15-60 years) mortality, per 1,000, Russian Federation, Latvia, and Ukraine, 1960-2006. 20

Tables

1. Contribution of change in mortality from each cause of death to the change in the life expectancy, Russia, 1990-1994 21

2. Contribution of change in mortality from each age group to the change in life expectancy, Russia, 1990-1994 23

3. Adjusted relative risks of death from all-cause, cardiovascular, coronary heart, stroke, and external causes by alcohol intake during previous week and by typical dose per occasion 38

4. Adjusted relative risks of death from cardiovascular disease by frequency of drinking, stratified by typical dose per drinking occasion (drinkers only) 38

Chapter 1

Introduction

I first went to Russia in 1993 and 1994. It was a time largely regarded as lawless and chaotic, *bezporiadok*[1], or without order in Russian. In St. Petersburg I lived in a sleeper district in a Brezhnev-era apartment building at the then northernmost station of the blue metro line. Outside the *Prospekt Prosveshcheniia* (Enlightenment Avenue) metro station elderly Russian women stood in lines selling one dried fish, a collection of homemade canned goods, or dried mushrooms on a string. They laid their meager wares on overturned wooden crates or a piece of canvas on the ground. At this same metro station I watched men in leather jackets drive up in BMWs to the collection of kiosks. They offered protection to kiosk owners in exchange for cash. One morning the charred portion of a kiosk frame stood still smoldering in the cold, likely the cost of not buying enough protection from the mafia. On my way to Russian classes one morning I saw a man lying face down in the snow in a concrete planting bed, used for pansies in the spring. People streamed past him through the heavy swinging doors and into the warm blow of metro air. He was dead, a casualty of alcohol and winter temperatures.

During the summer of 1994, which I spent in Yekaterinburg in the Urals, living with Nadya[2], my Russian friend, and her teenage son, we went to the country cottage, or

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[1] I follow the U.S. Library of Congress system for Russian transliteration, except where spellings of certain words or names are already familiar to Westerners.

[2] In all cases, I use pseudonyms for friends and interviewees. Russian names include a first, patronymic, and last name. By custom I would have referred to almost all of my interviewees by first and patronymic

dacha. The *dacha* was located in a small village of *dachas*, surrounded by overgrown gardens. It was an idyllic setting. A small river meandered through the *dachas*. Grandfathers fished with their grandchildren. We collected wild mushrooms and harvested vegetables from the garden. I had perhaps the most amazing meal of my life in that unfinished, wooden hut—a garden vegetable and wild mushroom ragout cooked on a portable gas stove. Afterwards, Nadya and I lay on the bed and talked until late. I often wish I could reproduce that evening—at the *dacha* in the summer, after a cold, gray winter.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, Russia was at the apex of the most extreme drop in life expectancy in modern history—"an unprecedented pace of deterioration in a country not at war" (Leon and Shkolnikov 1998, 790). There is only one other instance of comparable demographic decline in the modern era and that is the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Sub Saharan Africa. During a five year period from 1990 through 1994, total life expectancy in Russia fell more than five years. Male life expectancy dropped more than six years to 58 years; female life expectancy dropped more than three years to 71 years (Notzon et al. 1998). The sharpest declines occurred in 1992 and 1993, the first years of economic shock therapy. In 2008 male life expectancy in Russia, at 62 years, had the dubious distinction of being the lowest in the industrialized world (United Nations Population Division 2009). The sex difference in Russian life expectancies is the largest of any country in the world. In 2008 women lived, on average, 12 years longer than men (United Nations Population Division 2009).

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names, given that they were not close friends. I did address some of my older friends by first name only. In order to simplify for the reader, I refer to many of my interviewees by first name only in the text.

The summer Nadya and I spent together, the increase in mortality was on the brink of abating, but the crisis was entrenched. Before I left Russia through Kazakhstan, Nadya's son attempted suicide in the apartment bathroom.

Anthropological demography

When I first began to think about this project, there were very few references to the Russian demographic crisis in the anthropological literature (Rivkin-Fish 2003; Rivkin-Fish 2001). Rivkin-Fish refers to the discourse of Russia's "dying out" (Rivkin-Fish 2001, 29). She writes, "Physical crisis is mirrored in moral fragmentation; biological degeneration represents the nation's social and ethical demise" (2001, 29). She points out that among nationalists and advocates of Westernization alike, "Requisite paths to recovery are often understood to involve changing the nature of social interactions, reconfiguring human relations, and healing the social bonds of daily life" (Rivkin-Fish 2001, 29) rather than changing politics. Recently, Rivkin-Fish's work on fertility has considerably expanded the anthropological literature on the demographic crisis (Rivkin-Fish 2010; Rivkin-Fish 2007; Rivkin-Fish 2006). In addition to Rivkin-Fish's work on reproductive health (2000; 1999), Raikhel's work on addiction and treatment (2010; forthcoming) and Lindquist's work on alternative healing and magic (2006; 2001a; 2001b) broach post-Soviet health in Russia, specifically how political economic transformation is reflected in emotions and psychiatry. The mortality crisis is sometimes noted as background, but is rarely taken as an object of analysis in its own right.

In the language of Durkheim (1979), who wrote about national rates of suicide in the 1800s, population statistics are subject to social currents. While fertility is a common subject of demographic anthropology (Bledsoe 2002; Greenhalgh 1995; Johnson-Hanks 2005; Kertzer and Fricke 1997), mortality is much less common (Kunitz 1994). Infant mortality is one exception (Scheper-Hughes 1997).

Medical anthropologist Paul Farmer's *Infections and Inequalities* (1999) might be read as an ethnography of mortality. He convincingly argues that infectious disease is distributed along "social fault lines" (1999, 5). Poverty and inequality, at the global, national, and local levels, are pathogenic. Here and elsewhere, Farmer advocates an anthropology of structural violence—"social structures characterized by poverty and steep grades of social inequality" or "the social machinery of oppression" (2004, 307). If Farmer's work is an ethnography of infectious disease and death, this dissertation is an ethnography of non-infectious disease and death.

Global political economy had fatal consequences in Russia in the early 1990s. The rise of neoliberalism, the fall of the Soviet state, and the introduction of internationally prescribed economic reforms reverberated through society, affecting the quality of social relations and the distribution of power. Sudden social disempowerment among a certain generation proved fatal. But I venture that Farmer's concept of structural violence would puzzle middle-aged Muscovites, who might instead diagnose the fundamental problem of the early 1990s as an absence of structure.

Theory

The relationship between social structure and individual agency is an abiding concern of social theorists. In post-socialist anthropology it is implicitly addressed in Burawoy and Verdery (1999) who draw on the theory of Jürgen Habermas (1989) to suggest that the collapse of the Soviet state and economy granted more importance to everyday practices. Burawoy and Verdery suggest that the collapse of state and economy, Habermas's system, gave more room and influence to everyday micro worlds—Habermas's lifeworld—which are the traditional province of anthropologists.

> Our view of the relation between macro structures and everyday practices is that the collapse of party states and administered economies broke down macro structures, thereby creating space for micro worlds to produce autonomous effects that may have unexpected influence over the structures that have been emerging. In the language of Jürgen Habermas…the disintegration of the system world has given freer rein for lifeworlds to stamp themselves on the emerging economic and political order. (Burawoy and Verdery 1999, 2)

In Habermas's (1989) account of the lifeworld and the system, modernity has "uncoupled" the system and the lifeworld. The system then colonizes the lifeworld, crippling the very mechanisms which serve to legitimize bureaucracy and economy. Burawoy and Verdery posit that the disintegration of the system allows the lifeworld to flourish. This seems much too simple an account of what happened in Russia, and elides the crisis of the early 1990s, which was a crisis not only of the system but also of the norms and values of the lifeworld. Middle-aged Muscovites who participated in this dissertation research. In fact, they spoke about not knowing other people and being unneeded, which seem to resonate with Habermas's notion of communicative action made possible by the lifeworld.

Habermas's may be right about the uncoupling of system from lifeworld, and the consequent colonialization of the lifeworld by the system, which he identifies as the central problematic of modernity. But the history of modernization is not so simple to undo. In modernity, the lifeworld also relies on the system. When the system recedes, there is no simple return to a pre-modern, pre-colonial state of affairs.

Most middle-aged Muscovites did not celebrate the early 1990s as a moment of independence from the incursions of state and economy into their social world. Rather they experienced these years as chaotic and disordered. Lifeworld was troubled by the collapse of state and economy because lifeworld had also co-opted the mechanisms of state and economy for its own ends. The lifeworld, "a reservoir of taken-for-granteds, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation" (Habermas 1987, 124) was also in crisis. The collapse of the system compromised the lifeworld.

My own ethnography uses Giddens's theory of structuration as a framework to appreciate how agency is empowered through structure. In fact, there is no agency without structure. There is no doubt that structures constrain agency—Farmer's structural violence—but the legitimacy of structure resides in the fact that as much as it constrains, it also empowers. Once this is acknowledged we can understand a Russian point of view on structure that indicates a lack of structure is also violent. Lack of structure fundamentally disempowers people. Social interaction relies on people understanding other people which depends on

the stability of social structures that constitute self and other. In Russia in the early 1990s the collapse of the system had a cost in lives, as people struggled against the sense that they no longer knew people and, therefore, no longer knew how to interact with people in order to exert some semblance of control over events.

I challenge the distinctly Western preoccupation with structure as constraining agency, but this necessitates going beyond the vocabulary of structure and agency. Giddens, to some extent, does this by taking social practices as his object. I, too, attempt to stay close to social practices such as *blat*, giving to others, and work in Soviet and post-Soviet society. The language of structure and agency reproduces the problem it attempts to resolve, by aligning agency with the individual, set apart from society. In this dissertation I do use the terms, but I also introduce another pair of Russian terms to grapple with both agency and structure as inherently social and interactional. Middle-aged Muscovites talk about space, *prostor*, and order, *poriadok*. The notion of undetermined, yet bounded, space, throws light on how structures create spaces for the emergence of agency. Furthermore *prostor* and *poriadok* do not privilege the individual as subject, since they both implicate the individual and society. This is illustrated most fully, and in greatest contrast to Western assumptions, through the examples of Russian soul, *dusha*, and Russian freedom, *svoboda*, which are held not in individuals but in relationships between people and in relationships between people and social practices.

Gender

Gender is extensively treated in the anthropology and sociology of Soviet and post-Soviet society, although treatment of men and masculinity is limited (Kiblitskaya 2000; Kukhterin 2000; Meshcherkina 2000) are fewer than representations of women. According to many scholars the transition made women more vulnerable in Russian society as they were disproportionately unemployed and social services such as child care were withdrawn (Attwood 1996; Gal and Kligman 2000; Hemment 2004b; Kuehnast and Nechemias 2004; LaFont 2001; Watson 1993). Bridger, Kay, and Pinnick claim, "It is…undeniable that women have borne a disproportionate share of the economic fallout of transition" (1996, 193). Hemment writes that "structural adjustment policies led to the dismantling of the social security system and sharp cutbacks in the health care system, affecting women disproportionately" (2004a, 817). There is some dissent on this point.

> There has been a tendency to consider the collapse of communism in terms of a balance sheet of losses and gains for women…This approach…ignores the fact that men as well as women are challenged by the end of the Soviet era. (Ashwin 2000, 19)

There is no doubt that men were more likely to die in Russia in the early 1990s. While men are more likely to die than women in most places, the difference between men's and women's mortality in Russia is the largest in the world. An interpretation of historic differences in mortality of Russian men and women, and the widening of these differences in the early 1990s, requires an understanding of men's and women's position under the Soviet state, their social relations, and, most importantly, what makes life worth living for men and women in Russia.

Nostalgia

There is no escaping memory and nostalgia in post-Soviet ethnography and culturology. In Paxson's beautiful ethnography of a Russian village memories pertain to social continuity or change. Memories are carried in social action. They change only insofar as new pathways of action are established and the social landscape altered. Memories among the villagers resist the new order by reasserting familiar stories, metaphors, rituals, "images, symbols, temporalities, ideologies, and emotion" (Paxson 2005, 14). They assert cultural continuity.

Berdahl's work in a former German Democratic Republic (GDR) village on the border with West Germany deals primarily with memories of societal change. During festivities commemorating re-unification, including a ceremonial burial of the GDR flag, "representations of the past were affirmations of the present" (Berdahl 1999, 208). But former East Germans also took part in a discourse of "nostalgia and mourning for an East Germany that had never existed" (1999, 219).

> In this discourse of nostalgia, metaphors of community and kinship have become increasingly prevalent. "We used to live like one big family here," I was often told, "now no one has time for any one else." (Berdahl 1999, 219)

These memories might be read as "'stubborn conservatism' or 'noble resistance'" (Paxson 2005, 346) and, in the context of the GDR, illustrate that the disavowal of the past is never a simple project.

In her book on nostalgia, Svetlana Boym defines it as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (2001, xiii). In Russia there is nostalgia for both the past and "for the unrealized dreams of the past and visions of the future that became

obsolete" (2001, xvi). Post-Soviet nostalgia is not merely the longing for Soviet society but for the promised utopian future that never was—the radiant future of communism.

The past is a constant specter in the narratives older Muscovites tell. Memories grapple with the present. Particularly for this generation, memories contest the present and future of a new Russia. The radiant future becomes the radiant past.

Death

When I tell some people about the Russian mortality crisis after the fall of the Soviet Union, they often ask me to repeat myself. More people died? They assume that Russians, at long last, had freedom. Why would they die? One answer to this question, and one I commonly give, is the increase in cardiovascular and alcohol-related deaths, which together represent the bulk of excess mortality. People are often content with that answer. They understand that this time may have been stressful as people lost their jobs and savings. What happened in Russia, however, was more than an economic depression. It was more than the dashed dreams of Soviet communism and the dissolution of the state. In their own words, middle-aged Muscovites felt *ne nuzhny* (unneeded). By this, they mean they had nothing to offer others, and thus no way to exert control over what was happening to them. Another answer to the question 'Why would they die?' is more provocative: Russians died precisely because they were free—free of structures which had provided them with the means to know and interact with those around them.

Not all Russians died, of course. Mortality was concentrated among the middle-aged in the capital city. These were the "generation of victors" born around the years of

the Great Patriotic War, as World War II is called in Russia. They came of age at the height of the Soviet state. Just as Russia was embarking on a scientific and technological revolution which propelled the Soviet Union's economy during the 1950s and 1960s, this generation entered the workforce. After the suffering and sacrifices exacted during the war and reconstruction, the 1950s and 1960s were heady times. Even later as the economy slowed and reform became inevitable, a radiant future of communism was still possible. Gorbachev's Perestroika (1985-1991) initially restored hope in the future. However these hopes were lost at the end of 1991 when the Soviet state collapsed. Economic reforms in 1992 meant that industry ground to a halt, inflation skyrocketed, social services receded, and chaos reigned. It was certainly a shock, but it was by no means therapy.

This generation not only lost their work and savings—they lost their lives. The experiences and expressions of those most at risk of dying reveal a generation who felt unneeded. Socially disempowered, many men died alcohol-related deaths as they tried to repair a sense of neededness by drinking. Women were protected from alcohol-related and cardiovascular deaths due to their central role in the family—they were still needed. Mortality had less to do with people's severed relationship with the state than compromised relationships with other individuals. The structures this generation had used to navigate in society, to know others around them, and to socially interact—chief among them work—were of little use in the disorder of that time. They died unconnected, unbound, unmoored. They died free.

Organization of the text

The first chapter of the dissertation describes the contours of Russian mortality, drawing on the epidemiology of the crisis. Chapter two introduces the methods of this ethnography, followed by an introduction to the central paradox of the dissertation in chapter three. The Russian concern with unbound space and the constraint of order sheds light on another, theoretical paradox in social theory—that of structure and agency.

The chapters on Moscow, war, and work provide a background on this generation's lives, and illustrate how the paradox of space and order manifests in the urban cityscape, the war and its social legacy, and the practice of Soviet work and *blat*, or the use of informal connections to secure needed goods and services. No account of the mortality crisis is complete without an understanding of what middle-aged Muscovites mean when they say they are unneeded. I introduce this emic concept in the chapter on war, and elaborate on it in every succeeding chapter.

Fundamentally, being needed means having something to offer. Being needed is intimately connected to history, the war, Soviet ideology, gender, work, and practices such as *blat*. This generation had been needed by the state, first for postwar reconstruction and then to labor for the glorious communist future. They had also been needed by others, to survive the war and postwar hardships, and later to secure the goods and services the state did not provide them. Soviet work serves as an example of being needed by state and others. Work integrated individuals within the order of the state, but work also permitted individuals to circumvent the state and create space for spontaneous social action.

The destructive logic of shock therapy violently collided with the progressive logic of the Soviet state. New forms of inequality bore down on the meaning of past labor and rendered a generation's labor in vain.

Being unneeded sheds light on alcohol-related and cardiovascular mortality and helps make sense of puzzling epidemiological findings introduced in the second chapter.

Finally, I turn to freedom and recent work, both philosophic and ethnographic (Boym 2010; Humphrey 2007; Paxson 2005), which suggests that while freedom may be a universal ideal, its experience is particular. Russian freedom, *svoboda*, is held in society and social relations, not in the individual against these. *Svoboda* implicates both space and order. The early 1990s made *svoboda* less tenable precisely because individuals no longer had a sense of space through which to push against order. A lack of order compromised a sense of space and freedom.

The questions I set out to answer were about death. What made the early 1990s so life-threatening? Why did so many Russians die? But I found that in answering these questions, death was less important than life. The mortality crisis opens a window on Russian life and vitality, and the spontaneity and sincerity in social relations that make life worth living.

Chapter 2

Mortality

In his May 2005 “State of the Country” speech, Putin identified the demographic crisis (*demograficheskii krizis*) as one of the most important problems facing Russian society. The demographic crisis revolves around both increasing mortality and decreasing fertility. Fertility fell from an average of 2 children per woman in 1989 to 1.4 in 1994 and 1.2 in 1997 (UNDP 2009). In 2008 the rate was 1.5 (UNDP 2009). The population of the Russian Federation, estimated at 148 million in 1990, has been declining by about half a million each year from 1998 through 2010 (United States Census Bureau). And while declining fertility and declining population are not unique in the world—Russia joins other European and East Asian countries with extremely low fertility rates—a rising mortality rate in an industrialized country is unique.

Troubling demographic trends go back to at least the 1960s when the Soviet Union became the first industrialized country to sustain a mortality reversal. In 1965 Russian men’s life expectancy began to decline and women’s life expectancy began to plateau. Since then there have been periods of improvement, but in 2008 Russian men’s life expectancy, at 62 years, was no better than it was half a century earlier. Currently Russian men’s life expectancy is the lowest of any industrialized country. In demographic textbooks Eastern Europe and Russia are often given as one of two examples of modern life expectancy reversal. The other is sub-Saharan Africa since the

HIV/AIDS pandemic, which produced dramatic drops of life expectancy in many countries in that region during the 1990s.

The historical divergence in life expectancy between Eastern and Western Europe since the 1960s has been called an East-West public health divide (Vàgerö and Illsley 1992). Whereas life expectancy in the West continued to steadily improve, in the East it remained the same or worsened. Figure 1 shows former Eastern bloc countries' male life expectancies against that of France and the United States from 1960 through 2008. From 1960 through 2008 men's life expectancy in the United States steadily increased by almost ten years to 76 years. In France, it increased by eleven years to 78 years. Generally, male life expectancies in the East and West differed by no more than five years in the 1960s. These differences grew larger until the mid 1990s when male life expectancies in the East began to recover. Likewise differences in female life expectancies (see figure 2) widened between the East and West from the 1960s to the 1990s, when the gap begins to decrease slightly. As much as the general pattern of an East-West divide holds, the Russian Federation, represented by a thicker line, is clearly distinct from the other countries in the graph. Russian life expectancies are strikingly lower and more volatile. Russia's life expectancies are lowest and have not recovered since the 1990s. In 2008 male life expectancy in France was more than 16 years longer than in Russia; female life expectancy was more than 11 years longer.

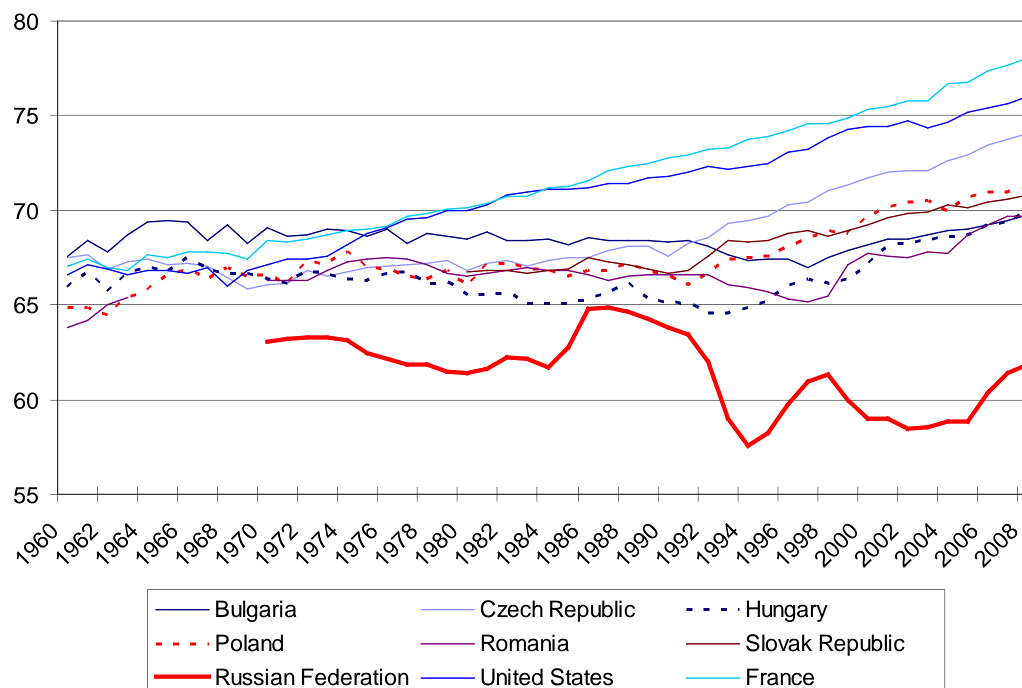

Figure 1. Male life expectancies at birth, selected Eastern European countries, Russian Federation, United States, and France, 1960-2008. *Source*: United Nations Population Division. 2009.

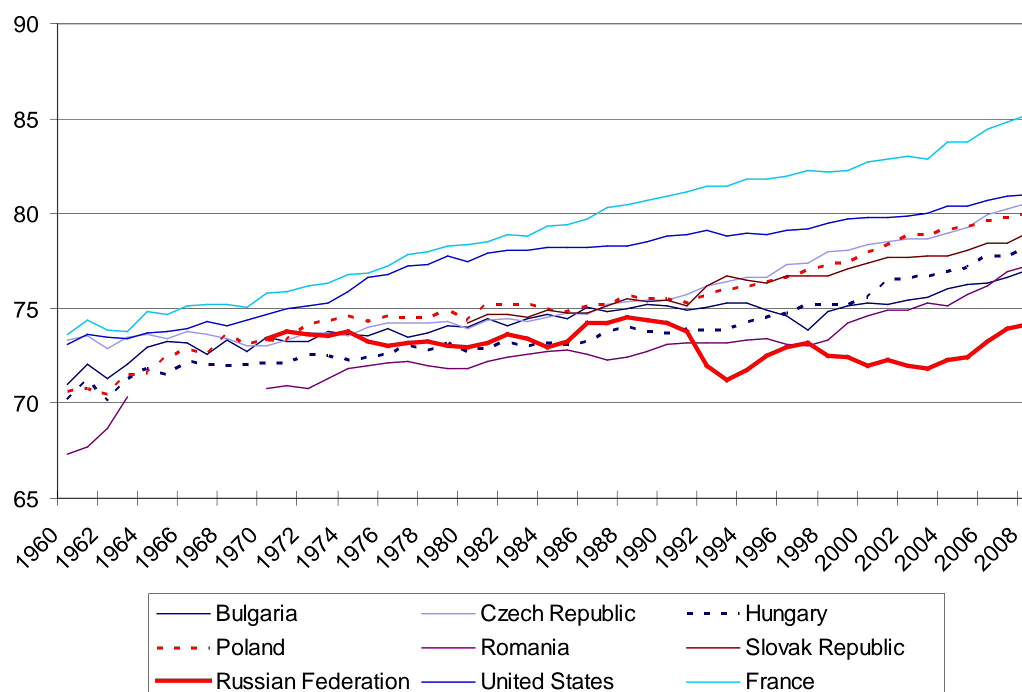

Figure 2. Female life expectancies at birth, selected Eastern European countries, Russian Federation, United States, and France, 1960-2008. *Source*: United Nations Population Division. 2009.

As might be expected, looking only at countries of the former Soviet Union (figures 3 and 4), the Russian Federation data are not as distinct. Among many of these former Soviet Union countries, life expectancy improved from 1985 to 1987. This is widely attributed to Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign and, less frequently, to the reforms of Perestroika, which Notzon and colleagues surmise may have "inspired hopes for a better future" (Notzon et al. 1998, 795). It is clear that men's life expectancy suffered a precipitous drop in the early 1990s in all countries represented except Georgia. The data is more complicated for women's life expectancy, but again most countries registered substantial declines in the early 1990s. Nonetheless, only in Latvia and the Ukraine did the declines rival those of the Russian Federation.

Importantly, Russian life expectancy suffered another drop from 1998 through the mid 2000s, widely attributed to the 1998 financial default. This drop was not as severe, but more prolonged than the drop in the early 1990s. In 2008 Russian male life expectancy was the lowest of any industrialized country at 62 years. Female life expectancy was 74 years. The sex difference in life expectancies, at over 12 years, was the largest of any country in the world. This sex difference was most pronounced in the early 1990s. In 1990 women's life expectancy exceeded men's by 10 years; in 1994 it exceeded men's by 14 years.

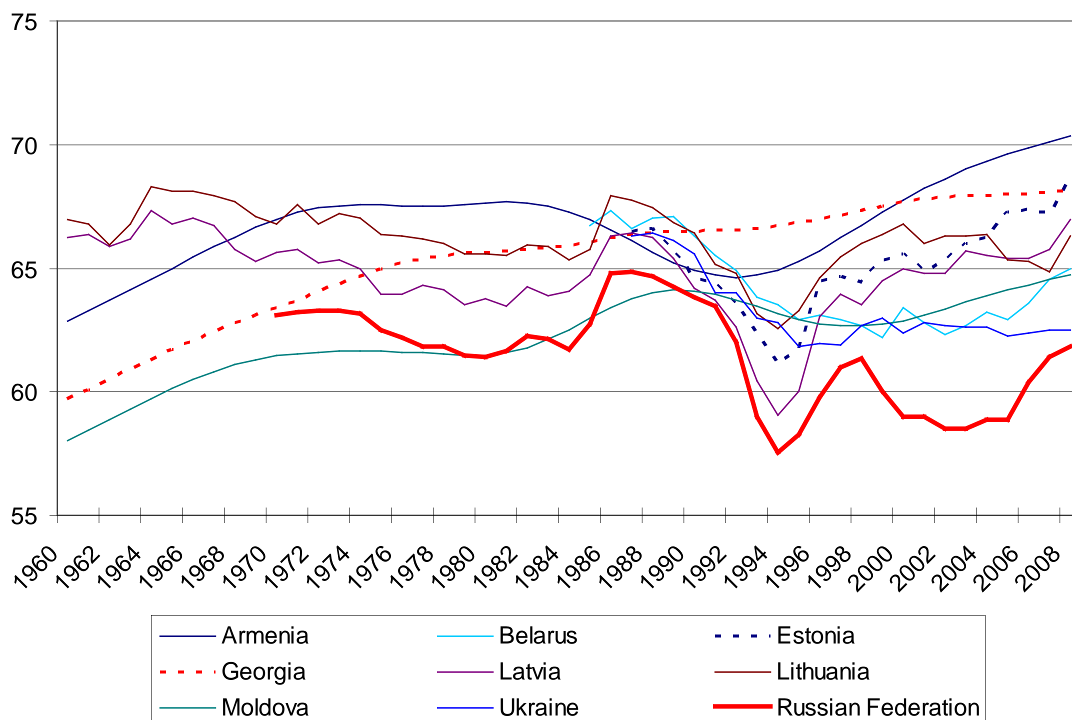

Figure 3. Male life expectancies at birth, selected former Soviet Union countries, 1960-2008. *Source*: United Nations Population Division. 2009.

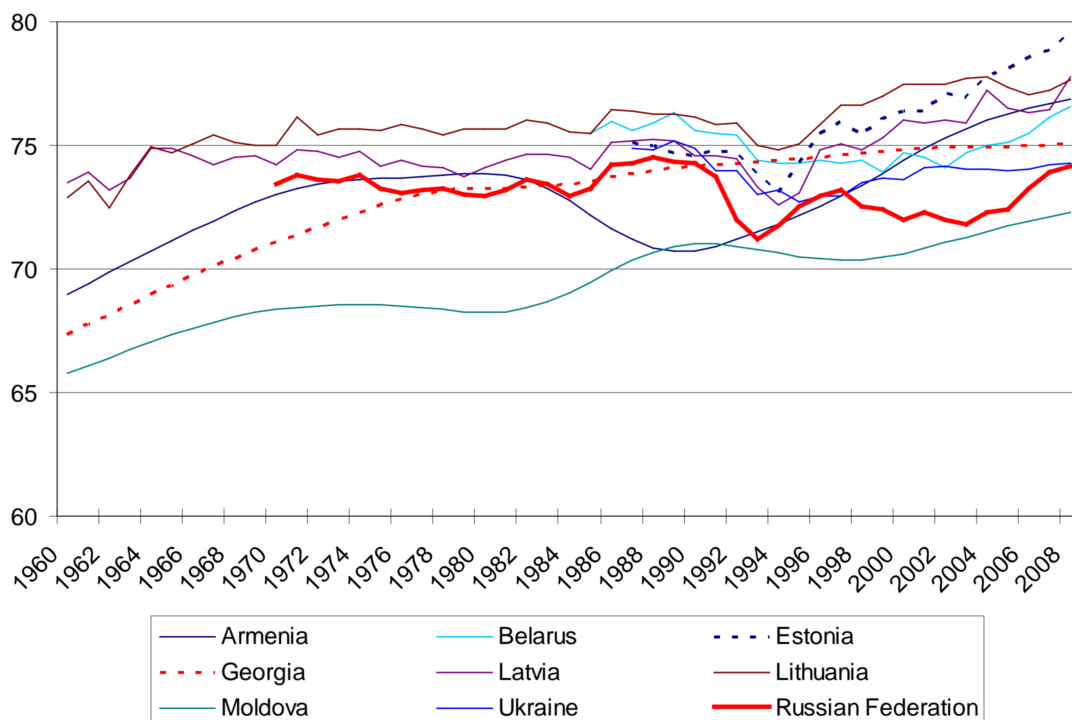

Figure 4. Female life expectancies at birth, selected former Soviet Union countries, 1960-2008. *Source*: United Nations Population Division. 2009.

Even against the preceding and succeeding trends, the drop in life expectancy from 1990 to 1994 is dramatic, particularly in Russia. Figure 5 illustrates the crisis even more starkly using Russian data on adult mortality, or the probability of a 15-year-old dying before reaching age 60. Included in the figure are the lines for Latvia and the Ukraine, the two former Soviet Union countries with the most comparable increases in mortality. As seen, the spike in working-age male mortality in the early 1990s is striking—so much so that initially there was some concern as to whether the increase in mortality was an artifact of better death recording. It is now well-established by epidemiologists that the data represent a real phenomenon, rather than better reporting (Leon et al. 1997; Notzon et al. 2003; Notzon et al. 1998). Latvia has a striking spike in mortality among both males and females in the early 1990s, although it is exceeded by Russian mortality. Similar spikes, albeit less pronounced, are seen in Estonia and Lithuania (not shown in the figure). The Ukrainian data (and to a lesser extent the Belarussian data, not shown) show an increase in mortality in the late 1990s and early 2000s which shadows the Russian increase, but in 2006 adult mortality rates were below those in Russia (429 per 1,000 males in Russia versus 385 per 1,000 males in the Ukraine; 158 per 1,000 females in Russia versus 143 per 1,000 females in the Ukraine) The Russian mortality crisis is the most severe in any country of Eastern European or the former Soviet Union.

Some observers treat the early 1990s as a continuation of the trend begun in the mid-1960s. Shkolnikov and colleagues describe mortality as increasing steadily, “interrupted only by a short-lived improvement in 1985-1987.” “In the early 1990s,” they write, “deterioration resumed” (2004, 31). I do not think the data indicate a steady

increase in mortality, but rather an acute crisis of mortality in the early 1990s from which Russia is only beginning to recover.

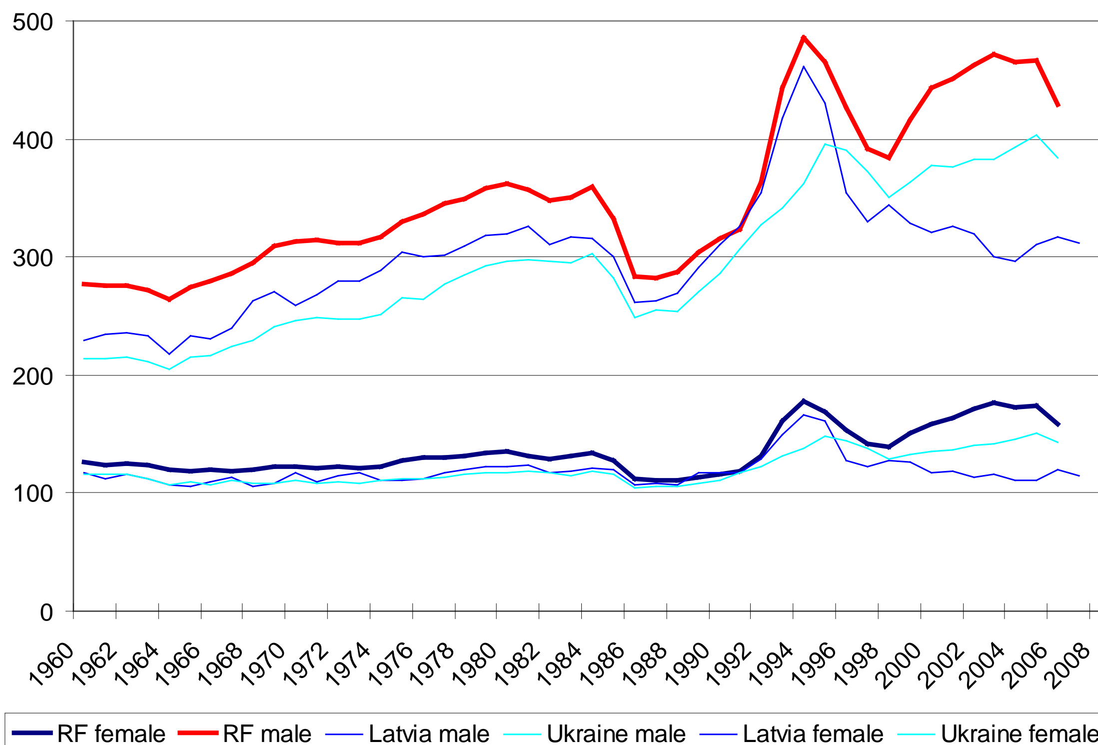

Figure 5. Male and female adult (15-60 years) mortality, per 1,000, Russian Federation, Latvia, and Ukraine, 1960-2006. *Source*: United Nations Population Division. 2009.

Cause of death

For over a decade the mortality crisis in Russia has been the subject of epidemiological and social science literatures. The principal causes of excess mortality are cardiovascular, injuries (suicide, homicide, and other injury), and alcohol-related deaths, including alcohol dependence syndrome, alcohol poisoning, and chronic liver disease and cirrhosis. Table 1 shows the contribution of each cause of death to excess mortality in the early 1990s. According to this data, from recorded cause of death data on

Russian death certificates, cardiovascular disease (diseases of the heart and cerebrovascular diseases in the table) and injuries are the main determinants of the drop in life expectancy in the early 1990s, representing 36 and 29 percent of the change respectively. "Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis" and "other alcohol-related causes" together account for 12 percent of the change. In data not seen here, death rates from alcohol-related causes, followed by homicides, registered the greatest relative increases (Notzon et al. 1998). Because cardiovascular deaths are much more common, a slight change in the death rate results in a larger impact on life expectancy.

Table 1. Contribution of change in mortality from each cause of death to the change in the life expectancy, Russia, 1990-1994

	Total		Male		Female	
Cause	Years	%	Years	%	Years	%
Infectious diseases	-0.12	2.4	-0.17	2.8	0.02	-0.5
Diseases of the heart	-1.35	26.1	-1.56	25.9	-0.85	26.9
Cerebrovascular diseases	-0.49	9.6	-0.45	7.5	-0.46	14.7
Malignant neoplasms	-0.04	0.7	-0.00	0.0	-0.02	0.8
Pneumonia and influenza	-0.17	3.4	-0.24	3.9	-0.06	2.0
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	-0.06	1.2	-0.09	1.5	-0.01	0.3
Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis	-0.12	2.4	-0.13	2.1	-0.10	3.3
Other alcohol-related causes[1]	-0.49	9.6	-0.61	10.2	-0.27	8.4
Motor vehicle crashes	-0.01	0.1	0.00	-0.1	-0.01	0.3
Other injuries[2]	-0.92	17.8	-1.17	19.3	-0.46	14.7
Suicide	-0.27	5.2	-0.40	6.7	-0.05	1.6
Homicide and legal intervention	-0.33	6.3	-0.42	6.9	-0.17	5.2
Remainder	-0.79	15.2	-0.80	13.2	-0.70	22.3
All causes	-5.16	100.0	-6.05	100.0	-3.16	100.0

Source: Notzon et al. 1998, table 5.
[1] Deaths attributable to alcohol intoxication, namely alcohol poisoning and alcohol dependence syndrome.
[2] External causes of death such as occupational injuries, drownings, falls, injuries due to operations of war, and injuries of undetermined intent. This category does not include the external causes of death of motor vehicle crashes, alcohol poisoning, suicides, homicide and legal intervention.

Social determinants of mortality

Perhaps surprisingly, the decline in Russian life expectancy in the early 1990s was most marked in the wealthier and more developed regions of Russia such as the cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, where male life expectancy decreased by 7.7 and 7.1 years respectively from 1990 to 1994 (Leon and Shkolnikov 1998). Epidemiologists Leon and Shkolnikov consider these “surprising geographic differences”:

> The abrupt economic and social changes that occurred tended to be most significant in those regions that, by virtue of their relative affluence and good communications, were most susceptible and open to change. For example, the abolition of price controls and removal of restrictions on private commercial activities in 1992 led to rapid changes in the nature of life in Moscow. In contrast, the economies of more isolated, remote, and less developed areas have changed at a slower pace. (1998, 790)

Walberg and colleagues concur that urban areas have been the most exposed to “social and economic transition,” as measured by labor force turnover (Walberg et al. 1998, 316).

Although a decline in life expectancy from 1990 to 1994 has been found for every age group, it is particularly pronounced among the middle-aged. Table 2 shows the contribution to the change in life expectancy for five- and ten-year age groups among the total, male, and female population. Numbers (almost entirely negative) represent how many years each age group contributes to the total fall in life expectancy over the five year period 1990 to 1994. Percentages reflect the proportion of the total decline contributed by each age group. As seen, most of the change in mortality comes from ages 35 through 64 for both males and females. In the literature, ages 40 to 54, or those born between the years 1936 and 1954, have been identified as the most at risk of dying excess deaths (Leon et al. 1997; Notzon et al. 1998; Walberg et al. 1998). A greater proportion

of deaths among the middle-aged indicates that absolute impoverishment is not a primary causal factor. When it is, death rates tend to increase among the very young and elderly (Leon and Shkolnikov 1998).

Table 2. Contribution of change in mortality from each age group to the change in life expectancy, Russia, 1990-1994

	Total		Male		Female	
Age	Years	Percent	Years	Percent	Years	Percent
0	-0.09	1.7	-0.09	1.4	-0.09	2.7
1-4	-0.02	0.4	-0.02	0.3	-0.03	0.9
5-14	-0.01	0.3	0.00	0.0	-0.03	0.9
15-24	-0.27	5.1	-0.36	5.9	-0.12	3.8
25-34	-0.59	11.4	-0.80	13.2	-0.25	7.9
35-44	-1.01	19.5	-1.32	21.8	-0.46	14.7
45-54	-1.26	24.5	-1.55	25.6	-0.70	22.0
55-64	-1.03	19.9	-1.17	19.4	-0.65	20.4
65-74	-0.58	11.2	-0.57	9.5	-0.43	13.7
75-84	-0.24	4.6	-0.16	2.7	-0.30	9.5
≥85	-0.07	1.4	-0.02	0.3	-0.11	3.5
All ages	-5.16	100.0	-6.05	100.0	-3.16	100.0

Source: Notzon et al. 1998, table 4.

Education, occupation, and marital status are also implicated in the mortality crisis, especially for alcohol-related deaths, and the patterns are similar to those found in the West, where more education, white collar occupation, and marriage are protective (Chenet, Leon et al. 1998; Malyutina, Bobak, Simonova et al. 2004; Plavinski, Plavinskaya, and Klimov 2003; Shkolnikov, Leon et al. 1998). Income does not appear to be associated with mortality which is not surprising given the lesser importance of income as a marker of status in Soviet society and the difficulties of its assessment in the immediate post-Soviet period. In the early 2000s it remained a poor predictor of mortality in post-Soviet Russia (Perlman and Bobak 2008).

Mortality increased most steeply in 1992 and 1993 (Shkolnikov, Cornia et al. 1998), the years of economic shock therapy. In a recent study, mass privatization—the transfer of at least 25 percent of large state-owned industries to the private sector—was associated with mortality among working-age men across countries of the former Soviet Union (Stuckler, King, and McKee 2009). The authors estimate three-quarters of the increase in Russian adult male mortality between 1992 and 1994 may be attributable to mass privatization. During these years over half of all state-owned enterprises were privatized. The authors address the Western architect of economic shock therapy directly.

> In a famous essay, and a series of other papers setting out the shock therapy package, Jeffrey Sachs argued that, 'the need to accelerate privatization is the paramount economic policy issue facing Eastern Europe. If there is no breakthrough in the privatization of large enterprises in the near future, the entire process could be stalled for years to come. Privatization is urgent and politically vulnerable.' Did slow privatization hurt the prospects for capitalism? Is Slovenia—one of the most gradual privatisers—any less capitalist than is Ukraine? In fact, by approaching transformation rapidly and radically, prospects for western-style capitalism might have been seriously impaired in countries like Russia. Countries that privatized more slowly managed to reach a capitalist endpoint but did not absorb nearly the same amount of social costs along the way. (Stuckler, King, and McKee 2009, 406)

Stuckler, King, and McKee suggest unemployment mediated the relationship between shock therapy and mortality, noting that unemployment meant more than the loss of a job "in view of the wider parts played by firms from the former Soviet Union in provision of housing, education, childcare, and preventive health care" (2009, 405). Other studies also point to unemployment as a driver of mortality (Perlman and Bobak 2009; Walberg et al. 1998).

These studies delineate a population at risk—unemployed, unmarried, working class, middle-aged male Muscovites with less education. The epidemiology on

cardiovascular and alcohol-related deaths point to a lack of social capital and psychosocial stress as the drivers of mortality.

Cardiovascular mortality

Cardiovascular mortality mirrors the general East-West mortality divide. Cardiovascular deaths rose in most industrialized countries until the 1960s, when they began to decline in the West. The Soviet bloc countries were an exception to this pattern—death rates rose through the 1980s. By 1990, rates in Russia far exceeded those in Western Europe and the United States, especially for cerebrovascular disease, or stroke. Age adjusted mortality rates per 100,000 for stroke in 1990 were 51 in the United States and 246 in Russia (Notzon et al. 1998). The difference in rates was augmented by a stark upswing in the cardiovascular death rates during the early 1990s. From 1990 to 1994 cardiovascular deaths increased by over thirty percent (Notzon et al. 1998). Although cardiovascular deaths account for a substantial proportion of excess deaths in Russia during the early 1990s, the literature specifically addressing cardiovascular deaths during this time is relatively sparse.

Cardiovascular behavioral risk factors include smoking, poor diet, and lack of exercise. These are all long-standing problems in Russian society. Furthermore, they may have increased during the early 1990s. However these risk factors are not thought to have an immediate impact on cardiovascular health. Intermediate risk factors include raised blood pressure, raised blood glucose, raised blood lipids, and obesity. Epidemiologists estimate that less than half of cardiovascular mortality in Russia is explained by these

classic behavioral and intermediate risk factors (Averina et al. 2003; Ginter 1995; Koek, Bots, and Grobbee 2003).

The World Health Organization's MONICA (Multinational Monitoring of Determinants and Trends in Cardiovascular Disease) Project from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s is the world's largest prospective study of cardiovascular disease in 38 populations in 21 countries of Europe and Asia. Using the data from Russia, Stegmayr and colleagues (2000) find that blood pressure, cholesterol, and obesity all declined between the years 1987 through 1994 in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk, Russia's third largest city. Smoking rates largely remained stable, only increasingly slightly among women. Yet the stroke rate increased markedly during this time. The authors conclude:

> It is evident that changes in socioeconomic determinants of stroke may have played a major role in the alarming increase in stroke rates in Novosibirsk. If so, it is evident from the present results that such socioeconomic determinants are not mediated by the most well-established biological risk factors." (Stegmayr et al. 2000, 7)

In other words, socioeconomic factors are important determinants of excess cardiovascular deaths in Russia during the early 1990s. Moreover, these factors may have specific physiologic pathways. New longitudinal studies like the Stress, Aging, and Health in Russia (SAHR) and the Health, Alcohol, and Psychosocial Factors in Eastern Europe (HAPIEE) studies are investigating the relationship between psychosocial risk factors and mortality, but the results will only indirectly comment on the early 1990s (Shkolnikova et al. 2009; Peasey et al. 2006). More work is needed on psychosocial factors and cardiovascular disease and death in Russia.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes low socioeconomic status and psychosocial stress—chronic life stress, social isolation, and anxiety—as psychosocial risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Starting with Berkman and Syme's (1979) study

of mortality in Alameda County, evidence has accumulated for the effects of social support on cardiovascular disease and death. Reviews of the literature on psychosocial factors and cardiovascular disease identify the following risk factors in Western populations: little social support, acute and catastrophic life events, depression, and, more equivocally, job demands and perceived control (Bunker et al. 2003; Eller et al. 2009; Everson-Rose and Lewis 2005; Krantz and McCeney 2002; Lett et al. 2005; Rozanski, Blumenthal, and Kaplan 1999; Tennant 1999). Recently, Surtees and colleagues (2010) report that limited perceived control over life circumstances is associated with cardiovascular mortality, independent of classic risk factors. The association is particularly strong among those at apparently low risk.

In another seminal study of psychosocial risk and cardiovascular disease, low incidence of heart disease in the Italian-American town of Roseto, Pennsylvania up until the mid-1960s was attributed to high levels of social cohesion, dubbed the Roseto effect. When social cohesion began to unravel, the rate of heart disease increased (Bruhn and Wolf 1979; Lasker et al. 1994). In part because of differences in definition and measurement, evidence that social cohesion or social capital influence cardiovascular mortality is equivocal. The effects may vary by population, gender, economic status, and age (see Franzini and Spears 2003; Hyyppä et al. 2007; Islam et al. 2008; Kelleher et al. 2004; Lochner et al. 2003; Scheffler et al. 2008; Sundquist et al. 2006).

Social capital

Political scientist Robert Putnam, whose work on civic engagement in Italy and the United States popularized the concept of social capital (2000; 1995; 1993), defines social capital as "features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam 1995, 664) and more simply as "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam 2000, 19). In his book *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam documents a decrease in civic engagement in the United States over the course of the past half century. He details declines in voter turnout, labor unions, church attendance, and membership in parent-teacher associations, women's groups, fraternal organizations, Boy Scouts, and Red Cross. Although Americans still bowl, they do not bowl in leagues.

Wilkinson introduced the concept of social capital in public health. In his book *Unhealthy Societies* (1996) he argues that income inequality destroys social cohesion and social capital and is related to differences in mortality among more developed societies. Kawachi and colleagues concur: "disinvestment in social capital appears to be one of the pathways through which growing income inequality exerts its effects on population-level mortality" (1997, 1495).

Measurements of social capital often incorporate elements of social support and social network. In the first instance, social capital is measured by what individuals receive from interactions with other individuals—for example, emotional, instrumental, or material social support. When social capital is treated as an attribute of social

networks, measurement may include number, frequency, and type of social contacts. A third sense of social capital is an attribute of group or place. Societies and neighborhoods have social cohesion; individuals do not. This requires a higher order level of analysis, using indicators such as the number of voluntary associations in a community. Szreter and Woolcock (2004) differentiate between bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. Bonding social capital exists "between members of a network who see themselves as being similar, in terms of their shared social identity"; bridging social capital is "between people who know that they are not alike in some socio-demographic (or social identity) sense (differing by age, ethnic group, class, etc)"; and linking social capital is "between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society" (2004, 654-655).

However much mutuality and reciprocity are emphasized as hallmarks of social capital by Putnam and others, in the hands of epidemiologists reciprocity is rarely measured (Abbott and Freeth 2008). Even when social capital is considered as social cohesion, the concept concerns what individuals receive from living in certain places. A few studies among the elderly have suggested that receiving support is not always beneficial when it leads to indebtedness and dependency (Silverstein, Chen, and Heller 1996; Stoller 1985). The specific relationship, condition of need, expectation of long-term reciprocity, cultural norms, and life course position all act as modifiers on the effects of receiving social support. In some cases, giving may be more important for health and well-being, perhaps through esteem enhancement (Liang, Krause, and Bennett 2001; Batson 1998).

Francis Fukuyama, famous for having declared the end of history after the fall of the Berlin Wall (Fukuyama 1992), defines social capital as "an instantiated informal norm that promotes co-operation between two or more individuals" (Fukuyama 2001, 7). However, it seems that social capital assumes particular social norms. Indeed a particular Western model of civil society is considered an epiphenomenon of social capital (Fukuyama 1998). This model requires the existence of voluntary associations, independent of the state, which serve to mediate between citizens and state. The unstated assumption of social capital is that it results in Western civil society.

Distorted social capital

Some social scientists attribute the Russian mortality crisis to low social capital in Soviet and post-Soviet society. Kennedy, Kawachi, and Brainerd (1998) find a lack of social capital in post-Soviet Russian society—which they measure as mistrust in government, crime, poor quality of work relations, and low civic engagement in politics—is related to mortality rates across regions, and particularly cardiovascular mortality. In their discussion, though, the authors move from the characteristics of post-Soviet society to the characteristics of Soviet society. Based on the association of crude death rates in 1980 and 1994, they see continuity in mortality rates across time, suggesting "a key consequence of Soviet society was the distortion of social relations, and subsequently the erosion of civil society which may have made populations of certain regions more vulnerable to economic and social transformations" (1998, 2038). In other

words, Russia could not withstand economic shock therapy because of Soviet social relations which destroyed civil society.

According to Rose (1999), Russia is an "anti-modern" society which lacks the rule of law to curb state authority. Related to this, links between citizens and the state are constricted, resulting in an "hour-glass" society.

> In an hour-glass society there is a rich social life at the base, consisting of strong informal networks relying on trust between friends, relatives, and other face-to-face groups.…At the top of the hour-glass, there is a rich political and social life, as elites compete for power, wealth, and prestige….the result is not a civic community but an hour-glass society, because the links between top and bottom are very limited. (Rose 1995, 35)

Rose calls Russian citizens "anticitizens." They "protect their well-being by keeping the center of the hour-glass as narrow as possible in order to limit what the state can do to them" (Rose 1995, 41). Rose refers to the "culturalist approach" to support the claim that today's unmodern Russia is deeply rooted in "the premodern folkways of unreformed czarist rule" (1999, 68).

> From a cultural perspective, events of the past half-dozen decades, and even more so, of the past half-dozen years, are assumed to make little difference to the relationship that Russians have to life, nature, work, and vodka. While the truth of this culturalist perspective may be exaggerated, its relevance to us is clear: that the distinctly unmodern past of Russia still exists as an unacknowledged legacy, and one with which the country must still come to grips. (Rose 1999, 68)

Against this background, Rose (2000) empirically investigates the relationship between social capital and health in Russia. He finds an association between participation in informal networks and poorer self-rated emotional health in post-Soviet Russia. That is, individuals who use informal connections to find a flat or get medical treatment, for example, have poorer emotional health. Rose interprets this as an indication that informal networks in the Russian context are "an indirect

measure of individuals retreating from formal organizations of an 'anti-modern' society that has left them with emotional scars" (2000, 1428). Perhaps Rose means that some Russians who rely exclusively on friends and family for help do so because they no longer trust social institutions which have persecuted them.

In an earlier article co-authored by Rose (Bobak et al. 1998), the findings include an association between reliance on formal institutions (employer, state, public organizations, charities, or church) and poorer self-reported health. In this case, individuals who first relied on institutions for help when they had a problem felt less well. The authors call this finding "difficult to explain" (1998, 277) but propose that, given the importance of informal social networks in Soviet Russia, "those who are forced to rely on formal institutions do so because they are socially isolated" (277).

In sum, both informal and formal measures of social capital have been found to be associated with *poorer* reported health in Russia. In contrast, Rose reports a "striking" relationship between better reported health and reliance on "anti-modern networks" (2000, 1428)—using money or connections to get officials to grant favors. Indeed this does not make sense in an "hour-glass" society where citizens try to restrict connections with the state "to protect their well-being" and "limit what the state can do to them" (Rose 1995, 41). In both of these articles, perceived control over life has stronger effects on self-reported health than social capital.

In the research discussed above, poor health is attributed to the legacy of the Soviet past. The roots of the mortality crisis lie in a longstanding distortion of Russian social capital. As in Shkolnikov et al. (2004), mortality in the early 1990s is interpreted as continuous with Russia's past. At best, the mortality spike in the early 1990s reflects the

inability of the Russian population to withstand painful but necessary reforms. Shock therapy in Russia is treated as normal, while the mortality crisis is an exotic complication. At worst, shock therapy simply drops out of the picture. In Rose's stark prose, "The legacy of the Soviet era is that of social failure" (1999, 70). Either way, Russians bear ultimate responsibility for the mortality crisis.

Alcohol-related mortality

Alcohol-related mortality is the primary focus of the social science literature on the mortality crisis. As early as 1993, Okólski writes, "It seems that of all plausible determinants of adult male mortality increase in Eastern Europe, the most widely accepted underlying factor is growing alcohol consumption." (1993, 177) In 1995, Ryan comments: "a favourite national pastime is proving fatal" (1995, 647). Epidemiologists agreed: alcohol "plays a central role" (Leon and Shkolnikov 1998, 790) and "evidence demonstrates the importance of alcohol" (McKee 1999, 824). "It is important to note that the analyses by cause of death strongly support the argument that alcohol has played a major part in the decline in life expectancy in Russia" (Walberg et al. 1998, 317). This is the consensus that is echoed over and over again in the literature.

The earliest articles on the Russian mortality crisis stressed cardiovascular and violent deaths (Shkolnikov, Meslé, and Vallin 1995). Quickly the literature turned to an almost exclusive focus on alcohol—its production, availability, cost, quality, proof, and consumption (Cockerham 1997; Leon et al. 1997; McKee 1999). When Notzon and colleagues (1998) wrote their seminal article detailing the contributions to mortality by

cause of death (see table 1 earlier in the chapter) they concluded that a number of factors were at play. Commentary on the article by Leon and Shkolnikov (1998) stressed that alcohol was the most proximate factor in the mortality crisis.

> Notzon and colleagues conclude that the steep decrease in life expectancy in the 1990s is the result of many factors, including 'economic and social instability, high rates of tobacco and alcohol consumption, poor nutrition, depression, and deterioration of the health care system.' However, alcohol appears to be a proximal risk factor and plays a central role in the recent crisis. (Leon and Shkolnikov 1998, 790)

Since then, the focus of the literature has migrated from the amount and type of alcohol consumed (Khaltourina and Korotayev 2006; Nemtsov 2002; Nemtsov 2000; Nemtsov 1998; Popova et al. 2007; Rehm et al. 2007; Treml 1997), to binge drinking (Bobak et al. 2004; Bobak et al. 2003; Britton and McKee 2000; McKee and Britton 1998; Nicholson et al. 2005; Pridemore and Kim 2006) and surrogates—alcohol-based liquids such as medicinal tinctures and colognes—(Gil et al. 2009; Lachenmeier, Rehm, and Gmel 2007; Leon et al. 2007; McKee et al. 2005).

A number of articles suggest that the pattern of binge drinking common in Russia may lead to hemorrhagic stroke and sudden cardiac death due to arrhythmias, and cardiomyopathies—which may also explain why cardiovascular deaths increase over the weekends in Russia (Chenet, McKee et al. 1998; Leon et al. 1997; Leon and Shkolnikov 1998). Bobak and Marmot (1999) then cautioned that the evidence for alcohol as the major determinant of the mortality crisis was circumstantial and insufficient given the tenuous relationship between alcohol and cardiovascular mortality. They called for more general research on the relationship between binge drinking and cardiovascular mortality in Russia. In a systematic review of the literature on pattern of drinking and cardiovascular mortality, Britton and McKee (2000) found evidence that problem

drinking (definitions of binging are not standardized) was associated with cardiovascular death, especially sudden cardiovascular death, in cohort studies in Norway, Finland, Sweden, Bosnia, Croatia, and the United States.

Surrogates are ethanol-based liquids such as cleaning agents, eau de colognes, and medicinal tinctures. In Russia, these are widely available and are significantly cheaper per unit of ethanol than vodka (Leon et al. 2007). Using a case-control design based on the population of Izhevsk, a city in the Udmurt Republic, the consumption of surrogates was strongly associated with all-cause mortality among working aged men. According to these data, fully 43 percent of mortality among working aged men is attributable to hazardous drinking, defined as the consumption of surrogates or problem drinking[3] (Leon et al. 2007).

Evidence on the relationship between alcohol and mortality from prospective cohort studies in Russia is still thin. There are methodological challenges to studying sudden deaths related to recent alcohol use (Tomkins, Shkolnikov et al. 2007). There is also concern that individuals generally underestimate the amount they drink (Nemtsov 2004; Nemtsov 2003). Existing prospective cohort datasets do not necessarily include adequate information on binge drinking or the use of surrogates.

The Russian prospective cohort studies that do exist report contradictory results. Deev and colleagues (1998) found no relationship between alcohol and cardiovascular mortality in a prospective cohort study, although estimates of alcohol consumption were mostly based on data collected many years before death. Plavinski, Plavinskaya, and

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[3] Problem drinking is defined as having one or more episodes of *zapoi* (a period of time marked by drinking and drunkenness, often lasting for days or weeks) in the past year or twice a week or more occurrences of excessive drunkenness, hangover, or going to sleep at night clothed because of being drunk (Leon et al. 2007).

Klimov (2003) focus on two cohorts of men in St. Petersburg recruited in the mid-1970s and mid-1980s. Among men with less than secondary education, mortality in the 1990s increased 60 to 80 percent but alcohol consumption only explained up to a 22 percent increased in mortality. They conclude that "the increase in mortality in Russia was socially determined, and though alcohol may play a part in this process it is not the sole factor" (2003, 1242).

Perlman and Bobak (2008b) recently used data from the Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey, a prospective cohort study, and found that more than once a week drinking (19 percent of males in the sample; 4 percent of females) significantly increased mortality risk. However, abstention from alcohol in the previous month, among a much larger proportion of the total study population (27 percent of males in the sample; 53 percent of females), also increased mortality risk. There was no significant relationship between binge drinking and mortality. They summarize:

> [O]ur findings did not fully support the hypothesis that binge drinking is of particular importance…Frequent drinking, however, predicted mortality in the full models and may reflect heavy drinking better in this study. The reasons for higher mortality among non-drinkers are uncertain, but, as elsewhere, it is plausible that this group includes former heavy alcohol consumers who stopped drinking because of ill health. (Perlman and Bobak 2008b, 98)

Malyutina and colleagues (2002) also report that men who were frequent heavy drinkers in Novosibirsk, but not binge drinkers, were at increased risk for all-cause and cardiovascular mortality in the early 1990s. Equally striking is the increased risk of dying among non-drinkers. Table 3 is a simplified version of some of their results, showing that non-drinkers are at increased risk of dying from all-cause, cardiovascular, and coronary heart disease deaths. There are four

other significant findings, two indicating drinking decreases risk and two indicating drinking increases risk. Table 4, which includes only drinkers, shows that those who drink 120 grams or more of alcohol three or more times per week (frequent, in the table) are at significantly increased risk of all-cause and cardiovascular mortality. These drinkers represent only four percent of the total study population. In their discussion the authors note, "we need to clarify the reasons for excess mortality in non-drinkers" (2002, 1453). Although they suggest that an appreciable 16 percent of cardiovascular deaths in the 1990s might be attributable to alcohol, they are cautious, writing that "alcohol is unlikely to provide the universal explanation for the mortality trends and fluctuations in Russia" (2002, 1453). Overall, evidence in this article indicates that most drinkers are less at risk of dying than non-drinkers. For four percent of the men in this sample drinking confers risk. For over eighty percent it does not. There is something wrong with referring to alcohol as the cause of the mortality crisis, since it may have reduced mortality among the majority of men.

Malyutina and colleagues (2002) find that adjusting for health selection bias—"by which drinkers with poor health stop drinking and thus artificially increase mortality in non-drinkers"—attenuates increased risk of dying in non-drinkers but the increase in cardiovascular mortality remained significant.

Table 3. Adjusted relative risks of death from all-cause, cardiovascular, coronary heart, stroke, and external causes by alcohol intake during previous week and by typical dose per occasion

Mortality	Adjusted relative risk				
	All-cause	Cardiovascular	Coronary heart	Stroke	External causes
Alcohol intake					
None	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Non-drinkers	*1.26	*1.55	*1.63	1.29	1.27
<40 g	*0.66	0.71	0.58	1.03	0.62
40-70 g	0.85	0.78	0.76	0.80	1.00
80-119 g	0.90	0.85	0.86	0.80	1.38
120-159 g	*1.38	1.25	1.13	1.69	0.90
≥160 g	0.93	0.91	1.00	0.61	1.26
Typical dose					
<80 g	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Non-drinkers	*1.32	*1.72	*1.81	1.47	1.37
≥80 g	1.00	1.02	1.13	0.86	1.50
≥120 g	0.94	0.97	1.17	0.52	1.60
≥160 g	1.05	0.99	1.27	*0.36	*2.08

Source: Malyutina et al. 2002, table 5.
* Statistically significant.

Table 4. Adjusted relative risks of death from cardiovascular disease by frequency of drinking, stratified by typical dose per drinking occasion (drinkers only)

Mortality	Drinking frequency			
	Rare	Occasional	Weekly	Frequent
All-cause				
<80 g	0.89	1.0	0.98	1.23
80-119 g	0.63	1.0	1.15	1.25
≥120 g	0.86	1.0	1.08	*1.61
Cardiovascular				
<80 g	0.92	1.0	1.16	1.34
80-119 g	0.60	1.0	0.93	1.07
≥120 g	1.07	1.0	1.22	*2.05

Source: Malyutina et al. 2002, table 5.
* Statistically significant.

It is probably fair to say that loyalty to the alcohol risk factor among epidemiologists exceeds the evidence from prospective cohort data, even though other

evidence, based on proxy data (retrospective data from siblings or relatives), is increasing (Bobak et al. 2003; Nicholson et al. 2005). Nonetheless, with more than a decade of research behind it, epidemiologists conclude “there is now compelling evidence that alcohol directly and indirectly plays a major role in both the high underlying mortality in Russia and, in particular, the fluctuations that have occurred in the period since the 1980s” (Shkolnikov et al. 2004, 59). “Alcohol provides the most plausible, proximal explanation for the massive fluctuations in Russian mortality” (Leon, Shkolnikov and McKee 2009). Its central role “cannot be denied” (Peck, Shankar, and Bangdiwala 2007, 151). Over time, estimates of alcohol’s contribution to the crises have increased from 12 percent overall (Notzon et al. 1998) to 52 percent among working-age men (Zaridze, Brennan et al. 2009).

It is clear that frequent heavy drinking and the consumption of surrogates are related to excess mortality in Russia, including cardiovascular and deaths from external injuries. It is not as clear that alcohol should eclipse other factors.

Psychosocial stress

The literature on alcohol and mortality in Russia is divided into two camps. One camp emphasizes continuity with an unhealthy Russian lifestyle that was exacerbated during the Soviet period. Drinking is “a particularly self destructive health practice within the overall configuration of Russian health lifestyles” (Cockerham 2000, 1314). Cockerham writes:

> During the Soviet period, heavy alcohol consumption became common throughout the year, which most likely fostered a lifestyle characterized by

> consistent binge drinking. This situation suggests that it is the normative demands of a particular lifestyle, rather than health policy or stress, that is primarily responsible for the pattern of male drinking in Russia. (Cockerham 1997, 126)

He concludes, "Although more research is needed, the strongest evidence to date suggests that unhealthy lifestyles are the principal social determinant of increased mortality in the region" (Cockerham 1997, 127). If lifestyle has been and continues to be unhealthy, it holds little explanatory power in terms of an increase in mortality. Why did the unhealthy Russian lifestyle suddenly prove so lethal?

The other camp emphasizes that alcohol is a result of psychosocial stress. Referring to an increase in alcohol consumption, Ryan writes:

> It is hardly fanciful to adduce a felt need to seek escape of a sort from the increasing harshness and bewildering uncertainties of daily life. For many people exogenously created changes may well seem to have threatened the social, political, and economic collapse of their country and, in a sense, of the world as they knew it. (Ryan 1995, 646)

Leon and Shkolnikov comment: "It seems plausible that the increase in alcohol consumption in the 1990s was driven by the stress of economic and political transformation" (1998, 791). And:

> Obviously, the often chaotic political and socio-economic transition of the 1990s created high levels of psychosocial stress, resulting in many premature deaths…This stress can be a direct cause of ill-health and even death but, more often, its effects are indirect, leading to heavy drinking and other health damaging behavior as a way to cope with it and so to 'escape' from the grim reality that is life for many people in Russia today. (Shkolnikov et al. 2004, 70)

Articles have proposed complex models linking socioeconomic transformation, stress, and alcohol. Walberg and colleagues (1998) postulate that acute labor force turnover with low social cohesion and high inequality leads to poor health, in part because of increasing alcohol consumption. Siegrist (2000) link the loss of social roles,

such as the work, marital or family role, to prolonged stress. Prolonged stress, in turn, leads to stress-relieving behaviors such as alcohol consumption. As seen in the quotes above, alcohol is seen as an escape, used by men as a maladaptive coping mechanism. These models, while intuitively sensible, are unsatisfactory, perhaps foremost because most alcohol use, even high levels of alcohol use, is not associated with poorer health. Rather it is often associated with better health.

Perlman and Bobak (2009) propose alcohol as a mediator between labor unemployment and mortality, yet they find "alcohol explained only a small part of the association" (2009, 1824). Even more puzzling are research findings that show alcohol use in Russia is not related to psychological distress (Cockerham, Hinote, and Abbott 2006); anxiety sensitivity (Zvolensky et al. 2005); alienation (Palosuo 2000); or poor self-reported health (Cockerham 2000; Perlman and Bobak 2008). In fact, studies report that alcohol use is associated with better indicators of health, both psychological and physical (Rose 2002; Bobak et al. 1998). Bobak and colleagues (1998) find that individuals consuming more alcohol reported better physical functioning. They find this "difficult to interpret", simply commenting, "[t]he direction and magnitude of this association are not plausible and most likely reflect reverse causation" (1998, 275). In other words, sick individuals stop drinking. The article focuses on perceived control as a predictor of reported health, but the relationship between alcohol and perceived control is not reported. Cockerham (2000) does not report on the relationship between alcohol and reported health, but does consider that men are both more likely to drink and more likely to report better health. He attributes this finding to men's "lack of knowledge or awareness about the implications of their health lifestyle, or a disregard that may

ultimately prove fatal" (2000, 1318). McKeehan (2000) reports that individuals who drink report better physical health in Moscow. For the majority of Russian men, alcohol may improve health.

Self-reported health and mortality are not the same outcome, but they are often correlated (Idler and Benyamini 1997). The fact that they show significant relationships with alcohol in *opposite* directions—drinkers report better health and frequent heavy drinkers are more likely to die—is intriguing and may help to explain why uncovering a strong epidemiological association between alcohol consumption and mortality has not been straightforward. McKeehan's (2000) article uses sophisticated multilevel modeling to show that while an individual who drinks is more likely to report better health, individuals living in areas of the city where more alcohol is consumed report poorer health. It is possible to interpret this as reverse causation. Another interpretation is that drinking improves health for individuals living in areas of the city where health is poor. In this case alcohol serves as protection in an environment of risk.

In a recent article Leon, Shkolnikov, and McKee write:

> We are still lacking an adequate account of what underlying mechanisms may have transmitted the shocks of the collapse of communism and the succeeding convulsions that affected all aspects of Russian society, to the behaviours of individuals, inducing many to change their drinking and thereby altering their risk of premature death. …a complete explanation for the role of alcohol in the Russian mortality crisis has to go beyond this to examine the social and psychological mechanisms involved. Pathways are going to operate both through the effects of ethanol on physiology as well as through the effects of social deprivation, impoverishment and isolation that are a result of drinking. (2009, 1634)

This quotation begins with a call for ethnography. Ethnography has the potential to reveal "underlying mechanisms" that connect large scale social change to the experiences and behaviors of individuals. The mechanisms hinge on an understanding of Soviet and post-

Soviet social relations and their embeddedness in larger ideological, political, and economic configurations of Russian culture. Leon, Shkolnikov, and McKee conclude by highlighting the effects of drinking on social deprivation, impoverishment and isolation. Certainly, frequent binging and the use of surrogates will have an effect on these. But drinking is also a reaction to social deprivation, impoverishment and isolation. Being unneeded is the more distal driver of the mortality crisis and it translates social collapse to bodily death from cardiovascular and external injury deaths, in addition to alcohol-related ones.

In the next chapter I introduce methods of fieldwork in Moscow and the central paradox of this ethnography—the Russian desire for both space and order.

Chapter 3

Methods

In the early months of fieldwork, I felt pressure to interview people, even in everyday conversations. I thought I should ask questions and push people further. In some sense it made my interactions with people unnatural and unsatisfying. I had planned to do 60 in-depth, audio-recorded interviews which included questions on childhood, schooling education, work, family, recent changes in Russia, and health. I knew that this meant I had to do about an interview per week. This doesn't seem like much, but it is a good-sized sample for in-depth interviews of an ethnographic study, especially interviews that include some life history. I had some friends and acquaintances I could ask for interviews, but I wanted time before asking permission to audio-record them. I contracted a research assistant, Sveta, who was a graduate student interested in politics and society at the Russian Academy of Sciences institute where I was affiliated. She and I made a few false starts together.

Recruitment

In August we decided to glue announcements around my neighborhood, inviting citizens 55 to 70 years old living in Moscow for at least 15 years to participate in a survey sponsored by the institute, with compensation. A couple of young men in their early

twenties, who were talking in the courtyard, taunted Sveta and me as we glued announcements on the boards next to the building doors. “Are you from the apartment management?” Sveta responded with a laugh. “Uncultured,” she muttered under her breath. Enrollment was by telephone. Because the caller pays a fee when calling a cell phone number we promised to call back any callers, using the registered phone numbers. The very next day I checked on the announcements to find that many had been purposefully torn away. I was not surprised when no one called.

The following week we decided to approach older people in courtyards and parks. On a Monday afternoon we talked to six women and one couple. Two grandmothers sitting in the courtyard said that they would answer questions. One was obviously much older than 70 and seemed to be in the early stages of dementia. Looking beyond us she mechanically asked, “Could I perhaps have some clothes, a new skirt, a warm sweater…” before her voice trailed off. A young man sitting idle in the courtyard, perhaps feeling protective, pointedly asked us what we intended to do with the grandmothers. After a few minutes it was clear that he was not going to leave. We said we would come back another day to talk. I left feeling as if I were preying on the elderly. One woman walking home with groceries in working attire, didn’t hesitate to tell us no. She said ‘no’ twice, quickly. Another woman, walking towards the *Novodevichyi* Convent also said ‘no’ twice. A couple chasing their grandchild around the pond outside the convent walls explained they were just visiting Moscow. A woman feeding ducks said, “My life has already passed. I like to feed the ducks. I have nothing interesting to say and I don’t need money. I get five and a half a month [5,500 rubles].” Sveta and I sat down on one of the benches by the

lake for awhile and talked. I was honest about my distaste for this type of interview recruitment. We brainstormed other ideas.

As we got up to leave we passed an older woman, but not too old—I'll call her Valentina—reading a book on another bench. Sveta looked at me. I looked at Sveta. I didn't have the stomach for another rejection that day. But Valentina saw us hesitate. "Girls?" We introduced ourselves and Sveta asked if she would be interested in doing an interview. She was keen. In retrospect, we should have done it immediately. But I felt drained and something in me did not want to pull out a notebook and turn on an audio recorder. Instead, as storm clouds gathered in the sky, we chatted about her book on Mozart. "Russians are not Germans" she said. "We're craftier." She spoke of Soviet Russia. "We had no illusions. But the human aspect of that time…Everything is sold now. Before we would have been ashamed." She was a music teacher at a college and invited us to attend one of the recitals. We wrote down her phone number and promised to call in order to set up a time to meet again. As the wind swept up, we walked towards the apartment blocks. She was not specific about which direction she was heading. I made a point to tell her where I lived and then said goodbye.

For a few days, Sveta tried to get in contact with her by telephone, and was only able to speak to her husband. "And who are you?" he asked. Valentina wasn't home; perhaps she would be home later that day. When Sveta and I met for coffee we tried once more. By some stroke of luck Valentina answered the phone and Sveta set up a meeting time on the same bench by the pond. This was the only interview Sveta and I did together. We were relieved that it went well, but after Sveta had transcribed our hour-and-a-half conversation, she was frustrated. "She says a lot, but I don't always know

what she thinks. She doesn't say much that is definite." Valentina spoke too carefully. There are times in the interview when she clearly comes close to saying something and then backs away from it, her voice trailing off. This may be due to the fact we were audio recording; it may simply be the way Valentina expresses herself. Or it is due to the fact that Valentina did not know Sveta and me from anywhere—we did not have an introduction. Oddly enough, in a city so large, I saw Valentina twice more that year by chance. In another city park we exchanged a few words. On the metro we acknowledged each other. She looked slightly uncomfortable and I was concerned she thought I was following her.

Sveta and I never again recruited on the streets. Instead we primarily relied on friends and family for introductions to people who expressed an interest in talking about their lives. Sometimes these people were also strangers. Dasha, a friend and scholar at the institute, who also happens to have a knack for getting people to agree to things, arranged interviews with her mother, her mother's friend, a neighbor, a taxi driver, and a pensioner she met on the electric train. While interviews with recommended friends were usually less stressful, the interviews with the taxi driver and pensioner may have been freer. The taxi driver could speak about infidelities and the failure of his marriage and the pensioner could tell me about his father-in-law's role in Stalin-era repression without fear that it would find its way back to anyone in their social circles. I promised confidentiality, but social recruitment of this type necessarily compromises that promise, as it is difficult to provide rich ethnographic detail about people's lives and disguise their identities at the same time. Except for Valentina and perhaps the pensioner mentioned above, everyone I interviewed was connected to someone else I knew. Many of these people will appear in

the pages of this dissertation. Some of them will read it. To the extent possible, I have tried to disguise people's identity without losing depth or authenticity of detail.

Interviewers

This type of social recruitment was slower, so we decided that Sveta would also conduct interviews. In January I also hired Ira, the unemployed 29 year old daughter of a friend, to help with transcription. She also ended up doing some interviews on her own. Sveta and Ira used the interview guide I had developed. Below is a list of selected questions from the guide. I encouraged Sveta and Ira to approach each interview as a conversation, allowing it to flow naturally. They were familiar with my flexible style of questioning from their transcription work. Not every question was asked in every interview and often we asked new questions. Each of us had a unique interview style. I would not have asked some of the questions the way Sveta and Ira did, and I am sure they cringed at the all-too-frequent moments in my interviews when it is clear that I have not understood something or am having trouble phrasing a question. In Sveta's and Ira's interviews the Russian language is not an issue. Interviewees use idioms and cultural references freely. The exchanges reveal common assumptions that Russians, even of different generations, have about life. I was more apt to interrogate these: "What do you mean by 'simple people'?" "When someone says 'nobody needs that person', what kind of person might she be referring to?" Sveta's interest and knowledge in the area of politics is evident, although it is not always shared by her interviewees. My own questions about health fall painfully flat most of the time. I gave up asking them after

awhile. Ira, by contrast, is not a trained social scientist and her interviews are more tentative and halting but also less encumbered. Her interviewees tell stories without worrying about how to describe their lives to a social scientist. She interviewed a close relative, a friend of her mother's and two neighbors.

- Sociodemographics
  - How old are you?
  - Where do you live now?
- Childhood
  - Can you tell me a little about your family?
  - What are your earliest childhood memories?
- Schooling
  - Can you tell me some of your memories about going to school?
  - How did you spend your free time?
  - What hopes did you have for your life? Did you think of a certain things in life that you wanted for yourself? What were those things?
- Family formation
  - How did you meet your spouse?
  - How many children do you have?
- Work
  - What work do/did you do?
  - Have you ever been without work?
  - Do/did you enjoy your work?
- Social change
  - How do you describe what happened in Russia during the early 1990s?
  - For whom were the changes easier/harder?
  - Did men and women experience the transition differently?
  - What are some positive/negative points of the Russian transition?
  - In your opinion, what is freedom?
  - How do you feel about the future for your children and grandchildren?
  - What do you think will happen to Russia in the future?
- Present
  - When you think back on your life, what do you think is most important?
  - If you were to give advice to young people about life, what would you tell them?

Place

Interviews ranged in length from half an hour to two-and-a-half hours. Most interviews were conducted in the homes of interviewees and almost always over tea or even a meal. In one case, I was sent home with a sweater to keep me warm. Academics were interviewed in shared offices, often over tea. A male member of a Russian sobriety society met me at the spa where he gives massages. After the interview he wanted to give me a massage, and asked me to lie down on the table. My pregnant belly prevented that, so he gave me a shoulder massage. I held three interviews in parks or courtyards. One of these was with Dasha's taxi driver. We met at a northern metro station. I had told him I would wear my long hair up, and that I was pregnant. "But will I be able to tell?" He met me with a branch of fragrant lilac and we headed to the nearest courtyard to find a bench. It was a beautiful spring day in mid-May, though, and they were all occupied. I indicated another courtyard around the corner of a five-story apartment building. He was the only interviewee who hesitated about the audio recorder, indicating that he would tell me more if I did not use it. We compromised by starting with the recorder on, agreeing that he could fill in other details when I turned the recorder off. As we chatted, an older woman approached us. In very general terms he introduced me and then she began updating him on news of friends and neighbors. I turned off the recorder. Her son drove up along the courtyard in an older *Lada* and made small talk about the materials he was transporting for his apartment renovation. It turned out that I had led him back to the courtyard outside his own apartment building. As soon as the older woman went back inside with her son he admitted as much. We laughed and moved to yet another courtyard where we talked

with the recorder on for about an hour. At that point I turned it off. We continued for perhaps another half hour or so and then talked about summer plans—the *dacha*, his lady friend, fishing.

The one interview I conducted in my apartment was hijacked. Over tea and pastries Maria told me how she became involved in the sobriety movement, diagrammed her theories on God, Jews, aural colors, cosmic energy and the coming 'Golden Age' when Russia will be the savior of a lost world. Eventually I was the one being interviewed. And yet her thoughts during the interview and at the alcohol policy seminar where I met her touch on a number of central themes of this dissertation.

Interviewees

Our interviewees belong to different social circles, which I should briefly identify. Sveta and I both interviewed academics (eight total), primarily affiliated with two Moscow academies. Sveta interviewed engineers and workers of factories located in Klimovsk, a formerly closed city of Moscow *Oblast'* (the densely-populated federal jurisdiction surrounding Moscow city), which is also Sveta's hometown. Ira and I interviewed three individuals who lived just outside of Zelenograd, another formerly closed city and Ira's hometown, administratively part of Moscow City although it lies within Moscow *Oblast'*. Zelenograd was an electronics city in the Soviet era and is now sometimes touted as Russia's Silicon Valley. It is home to a number of national and multinational electronic and computer companies. I interviewed three members of a

Russian sobriety society, whom I met at a conference on alcohol policy, which is further discussed below. I also interviewed two men from a weekly English club that I attended.

In total we did 38 audio recorded interviews. Sveta and I each did 17; Ira completed 4. We were not strict about the age limits, and thus our interviewees' ages ranged from 50 through 80, although most of them were indeed between the ages of 55 and 70. There were 23 women and 15 men. They were also not strictly from Moscow city, but also from the surrounding area, Moscow *Oblast'*. Nor is our sample representative, in any sense, of the population of Moscow city and Moscow *Oblast'*. Most glaringly, this sample is more highly educated. Ideally this research would have focused on working class men. At the same time, working class men are difficult to approach and audio-record by an American social scientist, especially one that is female and pregnant. In fact, I remember one Russian scientist at a conference sheepishly confess that it was hard to find willing, sober men at all for a study they were doing in a provincial town. Part of this is due to the demographic imbalance between men and women in Russia, the result of astounding losses during World War II and different life expectancies. Part of it is due to the level of alcohol consumption among working class Russian men.

In any case, the preponderance of well-educated interviewees was a concern and source of tension during the project. I continually asked Sveta and Ira to prioritize individuals with lower levels of education, preferably men. At one point, Sveta told me that it was not possible to find such men around Moscow. It was clear that she meant it was not desirable. In a later email she wrote "But, honestly, in general I have very few acquaintances without education, practically none. In Russia it is in general very rare.

And besides this, people without education don't like to speak into a recorder—they don't understand why that is necessary. But I will try." When she did manage to conduct an interview with a less-educated woman she emailed this: "True, it is short, but with a perfectly uneducated person (joke!)."

Unstructured interviews

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I conducted what are referred to as unstructured interviews, or simply asking questions and having conversations. I took notes when I felt it would not disrupt the interaction. Otherwise I waited until I was free to write down as much of the interaction as faithfully as my memory permitted. These interactions included ongoing conversations with friends and acquaintances or something interesting I overheard, sometimes only peripherally related to my research questions. Some of these conversations approximated the social change portion of the semi-structured interviews when individuals knew what I was doing in Russia and were forthcoming about their opinions on the subject. One summer afternoon when I was reading in the courtyard, a neighbor initiated a conversation. His views were unabashedly nationalistic and anti-Semitic. I suspect these would have been muted in an audio-recorded interview. In early September Sveta invited me to her family's *dacha* where her parents were spending the weekend. "You can interview them," she laughed, a little ambiguously. Their grandson by Sveta's sister, who bears the same name as my firstborn, ran around excitedly and took my hand to show me a small fir tree and the last cucumbers and tomatoes on the vines in the garden. Sveta's parents and I spoke at some length about

my research and their experiences but I didn't audio-record anything. It is possible I was too cautious in this regard. On the other hand, potential friendships were more valuable to me than even the most faithfully rendered textual data.

Participant-observation

In December 2006 my Russian colleague Daria Andreevna Khaltourina, who has written about alcohol's role in the mortality crisis, and I began to email funding agencies about supporting an international seminar on alcohol policy in Moscow. In part due to the prominence of this theme in the public health literature and its perceived public policy importance funding was quickly secured from the Wellcome Trust and the Nordic Center for Alcohol and Drug Research. The seminar, entitled "Developing Effective Alcohol Policy for Russia: World Experience and Russian Realities" was held March 1-2, 2007 at the Russian Academy for Civil Service of the President of the Russian Federation.

The Academy is an institute of higher learning for government employees. It is an imposing group of high-rise buildings at the southern-most stop of the red metro line. Formerly a college for party members' children, the architecture is expansive and stately, with an immense marble foyer inside the main entrance. The complex includes offices, classrooms, ballrooms, stores, cafés, restaurants and a hotel. Underground tunnels connect the buildings. At the intersection of two tunnels, fish swim in aquariums built into the cement walls. Daria had a second academic appointment at the Academy and although it was a bureaucratic headache to secure the venue it was more cost-effective than a private hotel.

Over 20 seminar presenters included prominent scholars on the mortality crisis, alcohol use, and alcohol policy from the Russian Academy of Sciences, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, among others. The press and a few members of Russian sobriety societies also attended. Panels addressed Russian alcohol consumption, alcohol mortality, and alcohol policy experiences in Russia and abroad. This seminar, including interactions between sessions, was an important site of participant observation.

I took part in day to day activities of Muscovites of all ages who were my friends. We shopped, drank tea, prepared meals, rode the electric train, went to the *dacha*, barbequed, planted potatoes, visited monuments, went cross-country skiing, and went on trips. Later in my fieldwork I asked some of my closer, older friends if they would do a formal interview with me. They were happy to help. And what I learned is this: even my most enlightening interview is but the thinnest sliver of that person's life. Margarita did not talk about selling her childhood home; Tatiyana did not mention her son's death (although I suppose I could have asked them about these specific events).

My deeper understanding about how older Russians have experienced the transformation of their world did not come from conducting interviews; it came from participating in people's lives. For example: Margarita's agitation while telling her friends about her first visit back to *Novyi Arbat* street in 15 years. Sleeping over at Margarita's place where the neighbor across the stairwell has publicly accused Margarita of being a witch and scratched the peephole in Margarita's door beyond the point of usefulness. Margarita bursting into Tatiyana 's apartment in a fit of nerves over the sale of the country home her father built before he was sent to the front in 1942 and never

came back. We took an early morning trip by bus, electric train, metro, another electric train, and by foot to the house which abuts a new development of villas, surrounded by a high cement block fence. I took over fifty pictures of her and the house that day. I was embarrassed when she cried with gratitude over the prints.

Shared experiences are the lifeblood of ethnography. And yet they are the ones that have been the most difficult for me to capture and write down. Frankly, sharing these experiences feels like somewhat of a betrayal. I profit through others' trust at letting me participate in their moral worlds (Kleinman 1995). Besides this, these experiences are emotional. When I returned from the field I taught a medical anthropology course. One class session I lectured about my dissertation research in Russia. I projected a few pictures of Margarita's country home, including the one with Margarita's backlit silhouette in front of semicircular window and inset door dressed with fine lace curtains. With that picture on the screen behind me, I had to stop briefly to collect myself. Anthropologists talk about shared experiences as participant observation, taking part in social life in an observant and reflexive manner. It is the cornerstone of ethnographic research. I appreciate this now more than I did even during my fieldwork. Yet I am not quite satisfied with labeling friendships as participant observation.

Ethnography in Moscow

Ethnography is the cornerstone method of anthropology, although it may also refer to a book which describes in detail the way of life of a specific group of people—the Nuer of Southern Sudan, East Harlem crack dealers, migrant workers in Israel, or

'mail-order' marriages. Ethnographic research entails participating in the lives of people through a period of extended fieldwork. As a method, ethnography purports to open a view on these people and their lives from the inside. Ethnographers attempt to explain how these people see the world around them and throw light not only on what they think, say and do but also on how and why they think, say and do those things. It is a lofty goal that assumes ethnographers will be able, at least in part, to put aside their own cultural viewpoints and judgments to open their minds and immerse themselves in another way of being. In my case, the point is not to simply write a dissertation about Russia's most recent transformation and its mortal consequences but rather to represent an ordinary Russian point of view on the subject. Of course, there are many Russian points of view among elderly Muscovites, but the idea is to seek cultural ideas that undergird Russian points of view.

In this sense, there is some pressure for an ethnographer to make sense of things in order to write about them coherently, although there are some ethnographies which consciously resist this. This pressure to understand and make sense of Moscow very nearly led to my undoing as an anthropologist. The first few months of fieldwork were terrible. In fact I called my husband, who was then back in Atlanta, and told him that I wanted to come home and forget about the research. It was not that I was particularly homesick. I had lived in Russia before and I spoke the language but this was different. I had friends in Moscow, both professional and personal. It was precisely the pressure of making sense of things that was so unbearable. I thought I had made a mistake about my career. I had gone into anthropology because I loved living in different countries, learning new languages, and talking with people who lived different lives. But the

pressure to do research, or what I thought was research at the time, took the joy out of the experience. I would come home at night thinking, “This is impossible. This place makes no sense. I can’t make any sense of things.” I was struggling to craft a coherent story about Moscow, Russia, and cultural transformation. Through it all I was haunted by the words of an expert on Russian politics at Emory University. A few years earlier, when I told him I was thinking of doing this research in Moscow, he said, quite curtly, “I can’t think of a worse place in Russia.”

Moscow is undoubtedly one of the hardest places to do ethnography, at least the ethnography I envisioned. Moscow and her inhabitants fiercely resisted simplifications and generalizations. I began to sympathize with students of anthropologist Ruth Benedict, who thought that Russian emotional bipolarity was related to the practice of swaddling babies (Gorer and Rickman 1962). It did seem that life in Moscow was swayed by currents of mania and melancholy. One day walking home, discouraged, I had a small epiphany. One of the defining characteristics of the city, and perhaps the country as a whole, is a ‘sense’ of incoherence, absurdity and unpredictability. This makes Russia both frustrating and thrilling. Of course, I knew this from living in St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, and Moscow in 1993, 1994, and 2004. I knew this from Russians who told me that their life was incomprehensible and absurd. I knew this from reading other ethnographies about Russia where informants warn their anthropologists:

> It is impossible for you Westerners to understand our lives...trying to understand us rationally. Russian reality is based on absurdisms—economic, social, even scientific. All our life is based on absurdity, impossibility. Russian daily life is simply absurd and preposterous. (Ries 1997, 94)

I knew this from my own feelings about living in Russia: the exhilaration and the frustration.

Russian émigrée Boym writes of estrangement and longing as part and parcel of what she calls ironic nostalgia—" a good balance between homesickness and the sickness of being home that is necessary for a cultural mythologist" (Boym 1994, 290). Even for her people, Russia refuses to submit. This is how she charms and this is how she frustrates. She is never completely known and always retains her ability to surprise, in both pleasant and unpleasant ways. Russian poet Fyodor Tyutchev's observation is widely quoted:

> You cannot understand Russia by your mind,
> Cannot measure her with a common yardstick:
> She has a special character
> You can only believe in Russia.

Under the pressure to be a social scientist, to make sense of things and ultimately to write a dissertation with a point I had become blind to the obvious. Once I accepted that things did not have to make sense, indeed that my point could be that things did not make sense, I relaxed. I listened. I stopped trying to test everything I heard against some hypothesis I was working on in my head. I began to enjoy Moscow, myself, and my work.

Telling a coherent story necessitates simplification and generalization. There is no way around it. But I also hope to preserve some of the messiness and contrasts inherent in Moscow life, by allowing contradictions to surface throughout the story. One of the ways to do this is by focusing on paradox.

Chapter 4

Paradox

A few months into fieldwork some fellow Fulbright scholars told me the story of another anthropologist, who, on his last day in the city of St. Petersburg, “lost it” on a bus. They couldn’t remember why. Perhaps he was pushed or berated for not having the correct change. In any case, he let out a loud string of expletives in English. When he met up with them afterwards he was still shaken. They told me it was completely unlike him to react that way. I sympathized with the anthropologist, but the story was funny because of its implied irony. Anthropologists are supposed to fit in and understand local practices. In many ways, it seemed like a story about anthropological failure.

Months later, toward the end of my own fieldwork, I stood in a long line at *Kievskyi* Station to buy train tickets. When my turn came at the window the woman sitting behind the glass told me that foreigners had to purchase tickets in a special office. This was true when I lived in Russia in 1994 (although even then I often managed to purchase tickets as a Russian) but the dual pricing system for train tickets—one price for Russians, another for foreigners—had long been defunct. I told her as much but she was immovable. I raised my voice, asked for her name. I told her that she was wrong, did not know her job, and that times had long changed. I ranted about not having a Western salary. Her face remained stony. By that time there was not one person in the hall who did not know that I was a foreigner, I wanted train tickets, the cashier wasn’t going to sell

them to me, and that I was very angry about it. I moved to where my husband James, in Russian fashion, was holding a spot in another line. He raised his eyebrows ever so slightly, but didn't say a word. The young woman behind us caught my eye, smiled, and, shrugging her shoulders, said, "Russia is the land of miracles." "Exactly," I said. I bought the tickets without any problem at the neighboring window.

As the "land of miracles", Russia is unique, unpredictable, strange, and other, even to its inhabitants. Anything can and will happen. When I tried to ask interviewees about their future or the future of Russia the most common response was, "Who knows?" This openness and indeterminacy, as we shall see, is an integral part of Russian character and society. It opens up a space of spontaneity and possibility that is sometimes hard to bear unless it is, in some measure, bound.

After this I began to think about these episodes—the anthropologist on the bus and the anthropologist in the train station—differently. They did not seem so much anthropologist failings as Russian triumphs. Russia had done her work; she'd gotten under the skin. My reaction was more authentic than any anthropological coolness I might have mustered. I drew unnecessary attention to myself, but the Russians who witnessed the outburst were not disturbed. Such an occurrence is normal, even expected in the land of miracles. It has long been a central part of Russian identity. As Boym writes, "Russian, and later Soviet, cultural identity depended on heroic opposition to everyday life" (1994, 3). I am a product of a middle-class American upbringing, a particular family, and my own temperament. In public I am often reserved and temperate. In losing it, I may have become more Russian—direct, open, free. Russia drew me out. The moment was liberating. These moments, however much they frustrate, make one feel

alive. The individual revolts against the System and is rewarded with a feeling of freedom. Moreover, this moment had another reward in the Russian context. A stranger and I experienced a fleeting bond related to a struggle with the System. For a moment, we stood united in our recognition of an absurdity we had no control over.

The relationship between social bonds, constraint, and freedom is central to the story I tell in this dissertation. In the West the Soviet state is commonly regarded as a totalitarian state, where power is centralized and absolute. Citizens of the totalitarian state are not free; their lives are controlled and ordered by political authority. Certainly most post-Soviet scholars would agree that this is a far cry from what the Soviet state was able to achieve. Katherine Verdery is succinct: "contrary to the original 'totalitarian' image, socialist states were weak" (1991, 426). More recently Alexei Yurchak's notion of deterritorialized milieus is instructive. Deterritorialized milieus are "tightly knit networks of friends and strangers who shared some interest, occupation, or discourse" (2006, 131). These networks "drew on the system's possibilities" (2006, 132). Sitting around the kitchen table, among an intimate circle of friends and relatives, Soviet citizens inhabited space that was set apart from the state. That space was not immune from the influence of the state. In fact, the state specified the form and quality of the space. What made the space exceptional was its relationship to the state—just as a deterritorialized space is defined by its relationship to a previous order or power. The Soviet state was central to the logic and significance of social relationships and the experience of freedom in Soviet times.

When the state collapsed so did social relationships and the perception of a certain type of freedom. The constraints of state order and the constraints of social relations were

weakened. The space where Russians practiced freedom expanded infinitely outward. It became boundless, dangerous, unbearable, even deadly. Freedom without constraint is impossible. “Everyone went their own way” more than one middle-aged Muscovite told me, as if society was spun by a centrifugal force outward. Individuals, spun far apart, ended up socially isolated. “Each his own way, someone to robbery, someone else to binge drinking.” The Russian “craving for *freedom*, to lay all caution and pretense aside, no matter the risk” (Nielsen 2006, under “Interlude: Vitya”) was set loose. In the greater tragedy, Russians’ attempts to reestablish social relationships and moral intercourse with others sometimes placed them at risk of dying.

For a long time I did not understand this. Instead I saw a paradox I could not resolve.

Space and order

However much they complain about the vicissitudes of the System, Russians feed off of spontaneity and unpredictability, the unexpected. A widely repeated refrain is, “It isn’t allowed, unless you really want to.” Human relationships frequently render the rules of the System inapplicable. “No” does not necessarily mean no. If I did not have a pass to enter the Russian Academy for Civil Service I might be able to talk my way past the door guard, but not always. When I talked about this with my landlord over tea he said that it might be easier to live somewhere where rules were clearer, but he also noted that when his mother lived in a small village in French-speaking Switzerland she found it unbearably boring. Misha told me, “Those people would stop for a red light in the middle

of the night." Having lived in French-speaking Switzerland, I had to agree that many of them probably would. Then again, so might I. Toward the end of my fieldwork Ira's husband drove Ira, Ira's mother, and me to a friend's house. On the highway, Fedya commented, "In America the cars probably stay within the lanes." I replied, "And Russians would probably find that boring." They laughed. Fedya's mother-in-law said "Well you've learned something about Russians." The rules of the System are never truly fixed; this grants individuals space to maneuver.

In the summer of 2004, my friend Lena and I attended a Fourth of July celebration sponsored by the American Chamber of Commerce. When we arrived, the guards at the gate were not letting any more people into the *Kuskovo* estate where the festivities were being held. Lena tried to talk her way past to no avail. She then rolled up a bill into a tiny cylinder, gave it to one of the guards, and, grabbing my hand, marched us through the gate without waiting for any indication of permission, verbal or otherwise. The guards—there must have been at least five of them at the one gate—had machine guns slung over their shoulders. Once inside Lena giggled, "What do you think they're going to do?" That evening we watched fireworks over the lake. Every few yards along the lake shore there were fierce looking German shepherd police dogs with their handlers. Lena did not seem to notice. Later Lena and I were stuck in traffic as we tried to leave. It looked like it would be impossible to make a left turn. There was a young policeman standing nearby. Lena leaned out the window and sweetly asked, "Are you in charge here?" He said he was. Lena then asked, "How do we get out of here?" He promptly stopped traffic and we were able to turn left. I asked Lena why she went through this exchange, instead of simply asking him to help us turn left. She said, "You have to make them think they are

very important and then they will do something for you." As much as Russians bemoan these situations, they are highly skilled at circumventing the System through personal connections, whether long-standing relationships or fleeting instances when an agent of the System is rendered human. Misha, my landlord, spoke of the accomplishment of making a human connection with a member of the police force. It does not always work, but when it does it is gratifying.

Anthropologist Finn Sivert Nielsen, who did ethnography in St. Petersburg in the early 1980s, once tried to get a drink with his friend Vitya. It proved difficult. They ended up in a hallway behind a door marked "No admittance for unauthorized persons" drinking to the health of an obliging, drunk waiter of an establishment where no wine was being served. Nielsen reports the words of Vitya. "'Do you see why I'm happy to live here, and would never consider emigrating to the West?' he said, with something close to triumph" (2006, under "Interlude: Vitya"). This sense of space and freedom is contingent on thwarting the System.

An appetite for the unpredictable and contingent coexists with a yearning for order and the absolute. These yearnings were one of those contrasts I had so much trouble trying to resolve during the first period of my fieldwork in Moscow, before I realized that resolution of these contrasts runs the risk of distorting the very culture I wanted to understand. In *Culture: A Problem that Cannot be Solved* Charles Nuckolls advocates an anthropological theory of paradox. "A paradox is an idea involving two opposing thoughts or propositions that, however contradictory, are equally necessary to convey a more imposing, illuminating, life-related, or provocative insight into truth than either factor can muster on its own right" (1998, 273). Paradox lends culture dynamic and

generative possibilities. It is culture's vitality. To resolve paradox is to fatally distort culture. Paradox has a special affinity for Russia, where Russians themselves consider their country a place of paradoxes, contradictions, and absurdity. In fact an exclamation of "Russia!" might mean just that—difficult to understand, impossible to resolve. Anthropologist Dale Pesmen recounts a Russian who spelled it out for some American visitors. He uttered "Russia!" and then clarified "by adding the usually implicit word 'paradox'" (2000, 289).

Muscovites thrived at beating the System and yet many of them, at least among the middle-aged, were nostalgic for the old System and the constraints it imposed. Both of these sentiments reflect a yearning for the social relations of the past and a related sense of freedom. The imposed Soviet order meant that people felt united, if only because they were all subject to the state and its version of history. Their lives were to variable degrees organized by the state, especially through their work. This type of collectivity could be construed as Soviet or, alternatively, as anti-Soviet. In another sense, individuals were integrated through social relationships and connections which served to compensate for weaknesses in the system or against perceived injustices in the system. This sense of collectivity was more intimate and idiosyncratic, even as it bore the mark of the state. Social identity and action depended on the existence of the state, even when it undermined the authority of the state. Social relationships, notwithstanding whether they were more superficial, deep, fleeting, or long-standing were compromised with the dismantling of the Soviet system, the core around which they were organized and put to use.

The paradox of space and order also sheds light on other tropes of Russian discourse, often dualities themselves—culture and nature, civilized and wild, European and Asian, *narod* and *sistema*. *Narod*, or the Russian people, is almost always defined in opposition to those with power, who impose it over the *narod*. As Nancy Ries explains,

> Most often…*narod* implies 'the people' as distinct from those who have power…*Narod* always suggests by implication its opposite—all those who have power over, exploit, and do not take care of or appreciate 'the people.' *Narod* may mean 'the heroic people' but it more commonly stands for 'the victimized people.' (Ries 1997, 28)

Identity of the *narod* is contingent on the existence of those in power or simply institutionalized power. During Soviet times *narod* was defined in opposition to the Soviet state, or the Soviet system, often simply referred to as the s*istema*. Although the s*istema* imposed order it was hardly static. By the time of Brezhnev, the *sistema* was widely considered unsystematic and incomprehensible. Soviet order created space for spontaneous social action and, in fact, enabled that action.

When middle-aged Muscovites mourn the loss of the Soviet system, they are also mourning their ability to think and act in a coordinated way with other individuals around them in a way that is creative and not fully determined by the *sistema*. In many ways the *sistema* permitted the thoughts and actions which sustained it, but also those that eventually weakened it. The thoughts and actions of individuals who are constrained may work for or against the multiple systems of power which bring them into being.

Structure

Central to this dissertation is another, theoretical paradox which represents one of the abiding concerns of social theorists, particularly anthropologists. Anthropologists often speak and write of structure and agency. Indeed the central preoccupation of anthropologists is showing that who we are and what we do is a product of the cultures we live in. There is a troubling paradox here, and perhaps most troubling in the West, where we have an idea of the autonomous self, free to act, and an idea of culture and structure which determine self and action. How can the self and the self's actions be autonomous and yet determined by culture?

Many social theorists have proposed ideas to account for this paradox, often emphasizing either social structure or individual agency. Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration is an attempt to resolve the paradox in a way that treats structure and agency as mutually constitutive. I use Giddens as a starting place for analysis in this dissertation. His focus on social practices is especially instructive, even as he maintains a distinction between structure and agency, and preserves an individual that is able to reflexively monitor social action and "act otherwise." Giddens himself describes the structure-agency paradox as a tension between the "active, reflexive character of human conduct" and "human behaviour as the result of forces that actors neither control nor comprehend" (Giddens 1984, xvi). Broadly, he holds that the theoretical orientations of functionalism and structuralism privilege structure while hermeneutic and phenomenologic orientations privilege agency and individual experience. "The basic domain of study of the social sciences," according to Giddens, "is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the

existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time" (1984, 2). An agent only comes into being through social practices and these social practices, through repetitive expression, express structure. Social practices are the duality of structure.

In Giddens's theory, structure has no concrete existence apart from social practices although structure is not social practices per se. Structure refers to the rules informing social practices and the resources drawn on in social practices. Giddens takes particular pains to clarify that rules are primarily held in individuals' "practical consciousness" by which he means that most rules are unspoken and unwritten, and are not consciously known by individuals. Structure is manifest in individuals' ability to "go on" (1984, 23). Structure is not external. Rather structure is submerged under the visible in society, orchestrating the social practices through which it is made manifest.

Giddens writes, "Structure is not to be equated with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling" (1986, 25). As structure closes off certain possibilities of action, it opens others. To clarify this he turns to language.

> This is easily demonstrated in the instance of learning a first language. No one 'chooses' his or her native language, although learning to speak it involves definite elements of compliance. Since any language constrains thought (and action) in the sense that it presumes a range of framed, rule-governed properties, the process of language learning sets certain limits to cognition and activity. But by the very same token the learning of a language greatly expands the cognitive and practical capacities of the individual. (Giddens 1984, 170)

Giddens writes that structure is not to the same as constraint and is "always both constraining and enabling" (1986, 25) but structure enables and disables through constraint. Constraint is central to the concept of structure.

Another analogy may further help to understand what I mean by constraint. Streams and rivers carve out their paths in a landscape. Once established, these channels are exploited and become more permanent aspects of the landscape. Yet, in time, erosion may result in new waterways. Waterways are constraining, but that is how they produce current and erosion. The constraint of the waterway leads to force and change. In society, structure enables action and change precisely because it constrains. In constraint lies possibility.

I use the notion of constraint to flesh out one of the central points of this dissertation—constraint is integral to the Russian sense of freedom. Without constraint, freedom is deadly.

Agency

In Giddens's theory the agent retains some existence apart from social practices. Agents only exist through social practices, but they are able to "reflexively monitor" social action. Although most of the agent's "knowledge" is located in practical consciousness, the actor wields the rules and resources of structure and thus, must be, in some mindful sense, separate from structure. Despite this, Giddens's agent is primarily involved in repetitive day-to-day routine which contributes to the continuity of both the agent and social life. "Routine is integral both to the continuity of the personality of the agent, as he or she moves along the paths of daily activities, and to the institutions of society, which are such only through their continued reproduction" (1984, 60). Giddens's

agent is theoretically able to "act otherwise," (1984, 14) but must primarily act predictably in order to perpetuate self and structure through social practices.

Pierre Bourdieu has had more influence than Giddens in anthropology, and his practice theory also paints the agent as separate from structure, yet bound to act in ways that reproduce structure. Bourdieu's (1977) agent internalizes structure and this internalized structure, or habitus, is a system of dispositions which are both structured and structuring. That is, dispositions embody external structures and reproduce external structure. If Giddens's agent is located in the individual mind, Bourdieu's agent is located in the individual body, as habitus. Bourdieu's agent is entirely swallowed up by habitus and granted the ability to act only through the generative properties of the habitus itself. Habitus is structure writ small. This agent is not able to "act otherwise" because such action always lies outside the realm of the possible or thinkable. Action can never transgress habitus, but this is not to say that action is unduly constrained because habitus is generative.

> As an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted, the habitus engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions, and all the actions consistent with those conditions, and no others. This paradoxical product is difficult to conceive, even inconceivable, only so long as one remains locked in the dilemma of determinism and freedom…Because the habitus is an endless capacity to engender products—thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions—whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it secures is as remote from a creation of unpredictably novelty as it is from a simple mechanical reproduction of the initial conditionings. (Bourdieu 1977, 95)

In Bourdieu's account, the agent does not have an existence apart from habitus, embodied structure. As in Giddens, the result is a social theory taken up with routine and habit.

There are limitations in these two theoretical accounts of agency. One is that the agent remains separate from social structure to a certain degree, either ensconced in the mind (as in Giddens) or body (as in Bourdieu). The other is that there is not much space granted to social spontaneity and indeterminacy. In some sense these theories are too intent at showing how structures determine the possibilities of individuals' action and thought. There is no doubt that structures do this, but individuals also use and internalize structures differently. Bourdieu addresses this in his discussion of class, individuality, heterodoxy, and orthodoxy (1977, 86). Individuals each have variants of a class habitus. Individuals are still socially constituted, but each individual is constituted slightly differently. In class societies there is conflict over structure so that individuals become more mindful of structures through the imposition of orthodoxy—the rationalization of the social order—against heterodoxy—the existence and awareness of other possibilities. Despite these detours, Bourdieu emphasizes the "quasi-perfect fit" between external structure and habitus, consonant with "the logic of simple reproduction" (1977, 166) which results in a social order that is perceived as natural, not arbitrary. In Giddens's there is a bit more room for spontaneity and indeterminacy, but unpredictability is dealt with as a social problem instead of an integral characteristic of social life.

Individual

In this dissertation agency is not located in the individual, but in between individuals. This necessitates freeing the individual from the mind and body to bleed out into the space between individuals, in society. This will become clearer through reflection of the social character of the Russian soul, elaborated in a later chapter. For now, it is enough to visualize the individual as the space of the body in addition to certain space around the body where the soul resides and interacts with other souls. If part of an individual is located in society then an individual can come to emotional and physical harm through the weakening of social practices because these *are* the individual. When social structures are in crisis, so are individuals. Thus far, this vision may appear roughly consonant with Giddens's idea of personality given continuity through social practice. In order to take the individual more seriously we must consider social spontaneity and indeterminacy as central to social life. It is the unexpected and unpredictable in social life which creates an infinite diversity of individuals and individuals that change through time. Moreover, and perhaps counter intuitively, the spontaneity and indeterminacy of social life grants a sense of control, because unpredictability is evidence that the reign of routine and habit may be interrupted. In these reprieves, individuals have a sense of freedom from determination. There is more to this story, but it is better told through an ethnography of Russian space, order, and freedom.

Clearly structure makes agency possible. In some ways individual agency is a misnomer. Agency is always structural. Thoughts, actions, and words require constraint in order to make them meaningful and potent. Thoughts take form only within a mental framework. Actions must act upon something. Words only make sense as part of language. This, however, does not negate the individual, who is differently constituted and positioned in a matrix of social relationships and social practices. Individuals hold and use social structures, often conflicting ones, to create new avenues for thought, speech and action. Agency challenges the very structures which make it possible, by pushing up against them, exerting pressure, and causing change.

Nonetheless, the availability of more-or-less stable social forms enables us to conceive of others, imagine their motivations, and know them. Because we have a framework through which to see and interpret the complex social world around us we can think and we can act. In essence, we can be human beings.

Order presents spaces for spontaneity and agency. In the next chapter I turn to the city of Moscow, the site of this research, and a microcosm of the central paradox of order and space, state omnipresence and civic space, structure and agency. In a totalitarian state, individuals are presumed not free—unable to "act otherwise" (Giddens 1984, 14). In Soviet Moscow, this was decidedly not the case. Individuals had public space to "intervene in the world" (Giddens 1984, 14) and make things happen—agency. The order and space paradox of Soviet times is revealed in historical accounts and memories of the city streets and quiet

courtyards. Moscow city space, centered around the Kremlin, was ordered by the state, but Muscovites found plenty of space to call their own.

Chapter 5

Moscow

Moscow is a city of extreme contrasts. Initially I found it a very difficult place to do ethnography, but we made our peace. In this chapter I use a conversation about a Moscow city street to highlight the way space in Soviet Moscow was ordered (and reordered). Space, or *prostor*, is a highly significant concept in Russian. In the Soviet order of the city streets, Muscovites found the space to spontaneously make things happen. The confluence of order and space helps explain why mortality in the early 1990s was especially severe in the capital city. When the order collapsed, so did the bounded spaces of personal and collective expression.

First impressions

I vividly remember landing at *Sheremetevo* airport just north of Moscow in March 1993. I would spend over a year living in St. Petersburg, studying the Russian language and literature. My first memories of Russia, though, are of Moscow. At Sheremetevo, the airport immigration official signaled for me to step forward. A tall blond man dressed in drab green, he looked the part. He didn't smile, but he did ask me if I spoke any Russian. Nervous, I forgot to conjugate the verb. "I to speak a little," I offered. He nodded me on and I felt some relief that he hadn't found a problem with my visa.

Outside, snow was on the bare, brown ground in patches. We took an older grey bus and then the metro to a friend's apartment in the north of Moscow. The metro was awe inspiring, but outside the spring thaw meant that we walked through dirty, wet slush. The first vibrant green of a Moscow spring was still to come—tender leaf buds that are so anticipated after the winter. And the city itself was desperately in need of repair and maintenance. With so much concrete the color was overwhelmingly gray. Soviet socialism had fallen and the gaudy colors of Western capitalism—signs, advertisements, storefront displays, neon lights—were still absent.

Despite this, and the smallness of the two room apartment, my first impression was that the Soviet state had adequately provided for its urban population. It was not a luxurious life, but the public transportation system was enviable and the centralized heating definitely worked. After dinner we had a rectangle of vanilla ice cream, wrapped in silver paper. It was so rich it evoked cheese, but in the best possible way. That evening I soaked in a hot if faintly rust-colored bath and sank into a lumpy double bed, which converted into a sofa. A red Persian carpet adorned one wall. With a large down pillow and a red plaid wool blanket covered by a white duvet I felt very cozy.

Russia was actually in chaos. People had been thrust into poverty with the reforms of 1992. The industrial sector was grinding to a halt and along with it the livelihoods of millions of individuals. People who were employed were not being paid. Each day the price of essential foodstuffs rose while the value of the ruble declined. There were shortages of milk, bread, meat, and oil. Organized crime was filling the power void. The summer of 1993 would represent a brief reprieve before the darkest winter of this period, during which almost one million Russians lost their lives

prematurely. Although I remained unaware of the magnitude of the mortality crisis until years later, I saw and heard enough during the winter of 1993-1994 to know that something had gone seriously awry with Russia's 'transition to capitalism.'

Moscow contrasts

When I returned to Moscow in June of 2004 in order to do some preliminary research for this dissertation, the city was changed. I flew into the new *Domodedovo* airport to the south of the city and took an express train to the metro. I had arranged to rent an apartment near the *Sportivnaia* metro station, located across the river from Sparrow Hills and Moscow State University. On the outskirts of St. Petersburg in 1993 we paid $200 per month for a renovated three room apartment. In 2004 I paid $500 per month for the two room apartment near *Sportivnaia*. Two years later I paid $700 for the same Moscow apartment and that was a bargain. Apartments in the center of Moscow were renting for thousands of dollars per month. The southwest area of the city is known as relatively green and ecologically clean. In the fifteen years of increasing geographic stratification, the southwest was also relatively more affluent. In contrast, the southeast was known as working-class and poor. As a general rule, Moscow's wealth is concentrated in the center while the periphery is poorer, and this pattern is only increasing with time. In June 2004 *Tverskaia Ulitsa*, the main boulevard that radiates from the Kremlin and Red Square northwestwards, was awash in shops and designer boutiques. As I walked down the street, I felt awkward in practical shoes and a black travel skirt. Although I knew the city had changed, I had packed with 1994 in the back of

my mind—no heels, no whites, and no dry cleaning. I felt short and frumpy, out of place. I must admit that on *Tverskaia* a part of me mourned the Russia of 1994.

Moscow is a city I both love and hate. My husband James, after his first trip there in the summer of 2004, described it as "New York on steroids." On the streets it is an aggressive city, especially in the center. Russians will tell you that Moscow is a business city, as opposed to the more cultural city of St. Petersburg. I took a friend and Atlanta-based flight attendant on the metro, where she was shocked that someone exiting the metro rudely pushed her. What to say? I myself learned to push on the metro in Moscow. At first I thought racing towards an empty seat on the metro was beneath me, but I had my days. I was disgusted when I saw young men and women absorbed in music or reading while their elders stood, holding on to the overhead handles or vertical posts. But there were times when I too avoided looking around and held on to my seat. Once in line for the minibus to *Sheremetevo* airport the people in front of us ran over to the slowly approaching vehicle and began to climb inside the open door. The people behind us peeled away from the line, hurrying toward the minibus. I told James to do the same for fear we would miss it. I then watched him struggle to lift a large suitcase through the door and up the steps of a moving vehicle before it came to a complete stop at the place of the original line. Something about that saddened me. James is soft-spoken and almost always holds back in such situations. At my urging, he was learning to fight. The feeling of being forced to participate in demeaning behavior was not restricted to foreigners. On my way to a honey festival, after being roughly crammed into the corner of a complimentary shuttle bus, I heard a Russian middle-aged woman tell her son, loudly and angrily, "This is so barbaric."

I frequently tell Americans that Russians may appear rude or unhappy in public but in their homes they are hospitable and open. In general, this is true. But it is also true that even in Moscow kindness happens on city streets. And given the harshness and anonymity of the city this kindness seems all the more sincere and sweet. On more than one occasion, it made my day. Once when I was five months pregnant a cashier at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts waved for me to enter. "But I haven't paid," I dumbly insisted. "Aren't you 'in the condition'?" she asked. Well, yes, I was. She waved me through again. I am sure she thought I was a bit thick, and not only around the middle. But I thought she was kind.

Moscow is a seductive city, both racy and charming. There are four concentric circular main roads which overlie Moscow, forming a giant dart board around the Kremlin center: the Boulevard Ring, the Garden Ring, the Third Transport Ring and the Moscow Automobile Ring Road, or the *MKAD*, which is the city bypass. During the summer of 2004 I made a point of walking above ground as much as I could. I used a black marker to trace my routes on a map of the city. Once I arrived at Leningrad train station from St. Petersburg at 4:30 in the morning before the metro opened. Overnight I had ridden in a poorly-ventilated, yet remarkably well-heated third class sleeper car (*platzkartnyi vagon*). Each *platzkart* is divided into 54 sleeping berths arranged down one side of the car and on either side of partitions on the other side of a narrow aisle way. Instead of lining up and pushing with the throng through the metro doors at five, I walked in the cool morning air around the Garden Ring Road to the north and then the west. It was twilight and the streets were practically deserted. Occasionally a car would speed by in one of 14 available lanes. A bright sun rose at five. I cut in towards the center at

Petrovka Street, which meets the inner ring road at the *Bolshoi* Theatre in just over a mile. The words ‘road’ and ‘street’ seems inadequate to describe these broad avenues lined with imposing Stalinist architecture.

When I miss Moscow, though, when I am caught unawares by a sudden memory followed by a faint longing in my throat, I am almost never thinking of the center streets. I am thinking of quite courtyards with tired, crooked benches. The paint on the wooden planks of the seat and back—red and blue or yellow and green—is peeling. An older woman (always called a grandmother in Russian) might be sitting quietly, reading or keeping watch, bundled in old sweaters even in summertime. Younger women gather together, animatedly gossiping about neighbors, dropping their voices and looking at strangers who walk by. A child climbs or spins on the old painted iron play equipment. Men of any age might be sitting on another bench at the opposite end of the yard, often drinking together, talking loudly if they have been at it awhile and sleeping against each other if they have been at it even longer.

When I remember these courtyards, in my mind it is summertime. It is warm with a soft breeze—weather for a light sweater. A shaded path might be lined with rustling birch trees. In June in Moscow the poplar trees shed their cotton ball fluff—summer snowflakes floating in the air. In places it is hard to avoid inhaling the fluff, before it descends to the ground and clusters together. At some point a Soviet-era leader, Khrushchev according to one legend, ordered thousands of poplars planted throughout the city. I have always found the two or three weeks of poplar fluff magical, although it is a practical nuisance.

Courtyards of the city periphery are often nestled between the pre-fabricated five-story apartment buildings which are now slated for replacement. Khrushchev had them built quickly during the 1960s in order to remedy the housing shortage. In his memoirs Khrushchev writes, “In my day the goal that was set above all was to build as much housing as possible with the least expenditure of monetary and material resources.” (Khrushchev 2006, 291) Ostensibly, he thought that there would be less destruction to five-story buildings in the event of war. There was also no need to provide elevators. Russians generally regard Khrushchev’s apartment buildings as poorly constructed and bug-infested. They are known as *khrushchoby*, a play on the words Khrushchev and *trushchoby*, or slum.

Moscow is full of extreme contrasts. Boym writes about Moscow as the “big village” and the “Third Rome” (2001), a site of history and prophesy. In its myths, the city is traditional, cosmopolitan, even apocalyptic. Soviet Moscow was at once both an “intimate city” and a “megalomaniac capital” (Boym 2001, 97). It still holds these contrasts. In the small Orthodox churches, dark and hazy, the walls are lined with icons surrounded by thin pale candles, dripping wax. Here a priest in a long black robe swings an incense censor attached to a chain and a hidden choir chants a haunting refrain. A middle-aged woman may sit in the pews, her head covered and bowed under some silent burden of grief. At the boisterous outdoor *Luzhniky* market traders hawk their imitation Gucci bags and Prada shoes loudly every morning before packing them back into the ubiquitous plastic plaid-patterned rectangular bags. There are new sushi restaurants, myriad *kofe haus* and *shokoladnitsa*, and the utterly delicious fall salads made in tiny apartment kitchen from the last misshapen ripe *dacha* tomatoes, cucumbers, apples, and

tiny red onions on the windowsill, all chopped and heavily doused in oil. The walks through vast and plentiful parks, heartfelt chats over tea in the kitchen, the raucous singing and yelling of a group of teenage boys in the courtyard after a *Spartak* soccer game, the numerous toasts at a smoky business dinner in an expensive Azerbaijani restaurant. Some things are as they always were, some are lost along with Soviet Russia, and still others are strictly the New Russia, in existence only since the mid 1990s.

Any Russian will say that Moscow is not Russia. A Russian friend studying in the capital told me that when he visits his hometown he asks his friends and relatives "How are things in Russia?" It is a joke, but there is something to it. Another woman cautioned me, "Don't ever draw conclusions about what happens in the country by what happens in Moscow." Moscow is not Russia. And yet, when I repeated this refrain to a new acquaintance, she responded "It is and it isn't." Two centuries ago Russian historian Karamzin wrote, "whoever has been in Moscow knows Russia." Despite the differences with other cities in Russia, Moscow remains Russian.

Moscow, however, is busier, wealthier, more diverse, more stratified and more cosmopolitan than even St. Petersburg, the other big city in western Russia. One academic told me St. Petersburg was a dead city, "uninhabited, hardly breathing." "Understand, there is no money, so no impulse like in Moscow. Moscow! I love Moscow, with her furiousness, her dynamic, her fever, with everything, everything, everything. There is life in her." Most of Russia's wealth is concentrated in Moscow. The head of the Russian Academy of Sciences institute I was affiliated with told me, "Moscow is a special city. She very much differs from all other cities in Russia. Very much another character, other moods, other prospects, other opportunities, another pace of life."

Moscow transformed

One evening while having tea with Tatiyana and Lidia, Margarita recounted a trip to *Novyi Arbat* street with Tatiyana. Both Tatiyana and Margarita worked on *Novyi Arbat* at the State Committee on Material and Technical Procurement (*Gossnab*) from 1965 through 1974. *Novyi Arbat* is a portion of one of the main radial streets which extends from the Kremlin westward toward the White House, a Russian government building. Originally named *Kalinin Prospekt*, *Novyi Arbat* is a broad street with a series of identical high rise buildings shaped like open books lining both sides. Since Soviet times, it has changed dramatically, with casinos[4], department stores, shops, restaurants, cafés, and parking lots. Because of the parking lots, the street has narrowed somewhat. The broad sidewalks are also effectively narrowed by café seating. The neon lights, especially on the casinos rival those in Las Vegas.

In 2006 Margarita had not seen *Novyi Arbat* street for over 15 years and she was flustered. "*Krutitsia*" she said over and over, a word that literally means rotating or spinning. She was referring to the neon lights and electronic signs, which do indeed spin. *Krutitsia*, however, also refers to business activity, as noted by Dale Pesmen in her beautiful ethnography *Russia and Soul*. "*Krutit'sia* had long meant to engage in business…from petty speculation to buying and selling large lots of goods and 'something serious in the shadow economy'"; it "is running around in control, hustling, or out of control, 'like a squirrel in a wheel' or 'like in a meat grinder'" (2000, 192-193).

[4] Since 2009 the casinos have disappeared with the enforcement of legislation restricting gambling in Russia.

The bright blinking lights, the advertisements, the concentration of selling and buying struck Margarita as wild and frantic. To her it was uncontrolled and disordered. “A horrible thing is happening” she said over and over. Lidia sympathized: “Nothing of Russia is left.”

When I audio-recorded an interview[5] with Margarita I asked her to tell me again about going back to *Novyi Arbat*. The excerpt below is lengthy, but it gives a sense of how this generation interprets change in Moscow.

> Margarita: Oh, that was terrible. I told you, Michelle, first of all, we worked there at *Prospect Kalinin*[6], right? I said: Tan, let’s drop by …*Novyi Arbat*, I say. Oh, when I saw…We worked there. Oh, horror, everything lit up, illumination, oh horror! All of it, oh horror! That was before the New Year, wasn’t it Tanya? I don’t remember
> Tatiyana: It is always like that there.
> Margarita: Oh what a nightmare! I say, “Tan, I haven’t been here for many, many years.” We worked there at one time. Oh, no, but before it was good. And now I don’t like it, absolutely, some kind of wildness…
> Tatiyana: But there, there really, now there all those casinos, all those…
> Margarita: A nightmare, a nightmare, some kind of horror.
> Tatiyana: Yes and there are cafes, everything like that.
> Margarita: A horror, horror!

At this point, Tatiyana’s daughter interrupted to ask, “And what was there before?”

> Tatiyana: Understand what it was like there, I. There was space [*prostor*]. There each one of those books [a reference to the high rise apartment buildings, shaped like open books, which line the street] definitely had its own café. It did, sure. But it had them so that the ministry workers could eat there.
> Margarita: Yes, we went to the cafeteria *Angara*.
> Tatiyana: Yes, there was *Angara*, and *Moskvichka*. And above them a café. They were spacious [*prostorniye*], all of it. And between them there were railway and airline booking offices. And that was it. All the rest was

[5] All translations of quotations from interviews are my own. When I use these quotations, internal ellipses (…) reflect a pause or incomplete thought. Bracketed internal ellipses ([…]) indicate that I have excluded some of the speaker’s words. In written sources, I revert to common usage of internal ellipses to indicate an omission.

> simply space [*prostor*]. There was a store and above it two ministries on the right and left and a café. Another book, and likewise another, different Ministry to the left. There was a café there too and there was vast space [*prostor*]. Well how to explain?
> Margarita: There was a *Synthetika* store…gifts…
> Tatiyana: Well, yes, yes, that is all [the shops] were lower-end. A store or a café or a grocery or such a store…I mean people walked by…
> Margarita: A delicatessen.
> Tatiyana: Yes people walked by and, if they were going on or to work, they stopped in and bought everything they needed. And clothing. And it was affordable to each person, that is each one of those people, whether they worked there or…
> Margarita: That's right.
> Tatiyana: Or they had simply arrived from Georgia, from Armenia or from wherever, or they simply passed by and it was generally such a quiet atmosphere. Now, when you come out there on *Prospekt Kalinina* it is, of course, just, I don't know, terrible for those who worked there and saw something different.
> Margarita: I was just in shock. Literally.
> Tatiyana: Yes, in shock. Why? Because there are those spinning casino advertising signs, the touts. And what is more there is no more of that space [*prostor*]. Each door there, some shop appears. Some new doors which were not even there before. And all of those touts calling for you to come in. Of course it makes such an impression that you already understand that it is for a certain…not for everyone but for a certain type of people. That's it. It wasn't like that before. Before everything was very simple and very easy. That is how we saw it.

Space on the street

This excerpt is rich for interpretation. Here I want to focus on what it reveals about the ordering of Soviet urban space.

Tatiyana's and Margarita's comments reveal how central city space in Moscow has been reordered. They concentrate on two aspects of the old *Novyi Arbat*—buildings which were sites of state functions such as ministries and ticketing offices and the space of the street, including the cafeterias, cafes, and stores. The state architecture frames the space of the street. "There was a store and above it two ministries on the right and left."

In this sense, the space is the absence of the state. The cafeterias and café above them "were spacious, all of it. And between them there were railway and airline booking offices. And that was it. All the rest was simply space."

Tatiyana and Margarita struggled to explain the quality of the space. "Well how to explain it?" The space was vast, quiet, simple, and easy. Everyone walked in that space, no matter where they worked, where they lived, or where they came from. The space was a site of personal and collective expression and action, framed by the structures and functions of the state.

The fact that Tatiyana and Margarita also characterized cafés, shops and grocery stores as spacious, suggest that these were domains of expression and freedom, even as they were state enterprises. Although there were surly clerks and empty shelves, these were sites where individuals asserted themselves as individuals, and not merely state citizens, through moderate consumption. The limits on consumption did not make it any less rewarding. In fact, finding something special at a good price was a minor triumph in an economic system plagued by shortages and low quality goods. In 2004 my Russian tutor explained that finding one pair of stylish Italian leather shoes was exciting in Soviet times. "Now everything is available, but there is no money to buy it." No more sense of adventure and unknown possibilities. No more of that space.

Another interviewee also told me that Moscow is now a different city. Around the year 2000 she returned to an area of the city where she had once lived for eight years, walking from the Byelorussian train station to Pushkin Square, along a northwestern portion of *Tverskaia Ulitsa*, the more central portion of which I briefly described earlier as awash in shops and boutiques.

> Those were my own places, and I didn't recognize my own street. It was all banks. I came to Pushkin Square, got on the metro and returned home. I even cried. Because that is not my city. That is for sure, for sure. I will not drop into a store where I could before because it is entirely boutiques there. […] I have nothing to do there. They won't even let me in there. They will say, "Grandma, where do you think you are going?" For sure. Banks, boutiques, restaurants, where they will say, "Not dressed like that." […] So that street is perfectly strange, it isn't mine.

Tverskaia Ultisa (formerly *Ulitsa Gorkovo*) has always been a highly symbolic space in Moscow. Rüthers, drawing on Thorez, describes the street in the post-war years, contrasting the grand architectural facades with the courtyards behind them. "In the everyday life, two seemingly contradictory spaces existed: the anonymous and monumental in the front, and the retreat into the back as a space of self determination" (2006, 255). Writing about St. Petersburg, Nielsen draws a similar distinction between *Nevskyi Prospekt* and the back yards (*dvori*). The *prospekt* is civilization; the *dvor* "a closely guarded bit of untamed nature" (Nielsen 2006, under "A. *Prospekt* and *Dvor*"). The contrast between state architecture and personal space marked Moscow and St. Petersburg in Soviet times. In Moscow, in particular, the facades of the street were a testament to Soviet power; the courtyards a testament to its malleability. The street represented state order while the courtyards represented the idiosyncratic and spontaneous social life which asserted itself in the interstices of state order—a bit of contained disorder. One made the effluence of the other possible. But, as Rüthers herself illustrates, the street itself evolved into a site for the expression of individuality[7].

> Citizens came to Gorky Street in their best clothes to spend their time at leisure. They went window-shopping and strolled up and down Gorky Street between Okhotnyi Riad and Pushkin Square, all the while showing

[7] Rüthers (2006) focuses on the nightlife of the younger generation, namely the *stiliagi*, who emulated Western lifestyle in taste and fashion.

> off to themselves and to the world the achievements of socialism. They thereby took possession of the public space as one of leisure, consumption and fashion, a space of urban lifestyle offering identity. (Rüthers 2006, 261)

It is worth noting that the city itself has a façade and backyard—the center, radiating from the Kremlin, and a vast periphery of apartment blocks. The layout of the city itself reflects both the state and the society that flourished in counterpoint—a "reconciliation between authority and the people" (Boym 2001, 115).

Certain post-Soviet spaces painfully testify to what has been lost for this generation. It is not just the loss of the state and a stable order but the space to circumvent and push against that order.

Prostor

In one Russian-English dictionary the first definition of *prostor* is "space; expanse." The second is "range; scope; freedom" (Katzner 1994, s.v. "*prostor*"). *Prostor* is emblematic of Russia as a whole, both geographically and spiritually. When Valentina told Sveta and me, during our first interview on the bench by the pond, that Russia was a wild country I asked her to clarify. She mentioned the thousands of kilometers, the forests, the rivers, Siberia, and lake Baikal. She spoke of the distances and proportions. It is nature—untamed; and it is expansive—unbound. According to Caroline Humphrey "freedom has always been a highly spatial idea in Russia, and is associated with sheer openness, endless space (*prostor*)" (2007, 7). A friend at the English club told James that Siberia was the only place in Russia where one could be free. In this sense, space

(*prostor*) is possibility. Even in Moscow there is the space to get around the rules. A "no" that might become a "yes" signals possibility and space to maneuver, negotiate, express oneself—even freedom.

But that space is also uncertainty, even angst. My landlord admitted that living in a place where "no" meant "no" might be easier. Living with uncertainty and possibility, where limits are constantly renegotiated, is tiring. After all, space is uncultivated and wild. In Pesmen's ethnography a friend says, "That spaciousness (*prostor*) tires me out. Spaciousness. With a sort of indeterminacy. It's hard for me to incorporate, to learn to live with that space" (2000, 283). On the days when I could not talk my way past the guard at the Academy, when "no" remained "no", I felt that I had failed. Living in a place of unpredictable possibilities makes it difficult to know what exactly is possible.

Space is also an analogue for the expansiveness of the Russian spirit. Valentina spoke of Russians' wide nature and emotional richness by which Russians accomplish great things but also "get carried away." She described Europeans as "somehow narrow, [going] from this to that." Valentina continued, "On the other hand, a sense of form, discipline—that is what is difficult for a Russian person. That's why it has always been necessary […] to force, pressure." The Russian spirit is essentially untamed.

Over a century ago, in an essay on "bourgeois democracy" in Russia, Max Weber (1995) lamented the importation of capitalism into Russia. His point was that Western capitalism did not have "any elective affinity with 'democracy' let alone with 'liberty'" (Weber 1995, 109). But he also insinuated that democracy and liberty would come to Russia only when "they are backed up by the determined *will* of a nation not to be ruled like a flock of sheep" (Weber 1995, 109). Weber may have been right about capitalism,

but his reference to sheep is misleading. It is precisely because Russians are determined "not to be ruled like a flock of sheep", precisely because Russians are not sheep, that they have been ruled by an iron fist. And this is also the reason many Russians have preserved *prostor*—spiritual freedom—in times of oppression.

Mortality in Moscow

Tatiyana and Margarita's dialogue on the transformation of *Novyi Arbat* is helpful to open a window on the experiences of this generation. However, the points of reference are right before the fall of the Soviet Union and fifteen years after the fall. The mortality crisis, as we have seen, peaks in the early 1990s. At that time *Novyi Arbat* had not yet been transformed. The quality of the space, however, had been compromised by the collapse of order—the order of the Soviet state. Thus, in the early 1990s there was no stable state structure, be it Soviet or otherwise, to organize individual expression and give it meaning. People were free to do their own thing. Urban areas, and especially Moscow, were more affected by the mortality crisis because that is where the presence of the state was most felt and where people's sense of space was defined most fully by state structure.

In order to understand the experience of this generation more fully, we must understand their past. Their wartime childhoods and working years set the stage for a shock in the early 1990s that was not only economic. This generation began their lives under the shadow of the Great Patriotic War. The war was this

generation's benchmark by which they could assess the trajectory of their lives. In the early 1990s that trajectory swung back on itself to the chaos and poverty of their youth—the war and post-war years.

Chapter 6

War

> That felling, I lived through that felling—our patriotic war. That was a nightmarish time. I need to tell you that the sun was always crimson, the whole time, […] as if it were washed in blood.
>
> —interviewee

For this generation, war was their dark beginning and communism their radiant future. Echoes of war still reverberate in Russian society—in terms of demography and gender. In the early 1990s, middle-aged Muscovites were reminded of the war. History was no longer progressive; their sacrifices in vain. They remembered those sacrifices, and also a lost sense of collectivity. The seeds of order, space, and the mortality crisis of the early 1990s are all found in the war. This generation felt that their history, indeed, their lives were unneeded.

War as backdrop

On June 22, 1941 the Germans mounted the largest ever wartime land invasion, Operation Barbarossa. The aim of this attack was to take over the portion of Russia lying west of the Ural Mountains, including most of Russian industry and the capital cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg. The front was 1800 miles long; it was comprised of over four million soldiers. They marched through the Baltics to Leningrad, through Belarus

towards Moscow, taking Smolensk, and through the Ukraine to the Volga, taking Kiev. The Red Army was unprepared; in a little more than five months it had lost seven million soldiers. In total, twenty-seven million Soviets perished in the war; nineteen million of those were civilians[8]. Almost 15 percent of the entire Soviet population died during a four year period.

Eventually the Red Army was able to repel the Germans, and Russia played an important part in ending World War II. The significance of the war in Russian history, in present day culture, and in the Russian psyche is crucial to any understanding of the country. Although Tumarkin (1994) has written about the fall of "the cult of World War II", under President Vladimir Putin the cult enjoyed a rebirth. Victory Day, May 9, is a national holiday complete with military parade[9] on Red Square, fireworks throughout the city, and old war movies on television. The holiday is second only to New Year's Day in its cultural importance to Muscovites (Forest and Johnson 2002). Most of the men and women who served are now over eighty-five years old, but the generations after them have not forgotten the cost their parents and grandparents paid, often with their own lives.

The generation we interviewed was too young to have served in World War II, or the Great Patriotic War as it is called in Russia, but they experienced it in other ways. The oldest men and women interviewed remembered their fathers' departures to the front and returns, if they did return. Sometimes they remembered their mother's departures to the front. They remembered their mothers' hard work, at home or digging trenches. The war served as the backdrop to their lives. It was their starting point—the ashes from

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[8] In contrast, Germany had 7 to 9 million war dead (8 to 10 percent of the population); the Unites States had under half a million.
[9] The military parade, a tradition since 1965, was cancelled from 1991 through 1994.

which they arose. Their earliest memories are punctuated by war; their biographies begin with war.

> And my father was missing in action in the Great Patriotic War. They called him up on the 22nd of June, when I was still in my mother's womb. The only thing he said—if a boy is born call him Tolik, which she [my mother] did. That is all, and I was born the 2nd of October, 1941.

One woman went to collect her 7th grade diploma around the 25th of June, 1941. "We were all young, and we, we didn't know what a war was. You think, we're graduating—a noise, a yell, and they took them to the front. They killed, by the way, our teacher, God bless him." "We had just begun school and the war started"; "I finished one school year before the war"; a woman was born in June of 1942, in the town where her family had been evacuated. Another began his life a few months after Germany surrendered. "I was born the 15th of July 1945 at nine in the morning…The war had ended. The year 1945 the war ended."

After the war things did not immediately improve. A drought and its impact on grain production led to the famine of 1946-47. People ate weeds, acorns, the bran of grain. One man, who would have been five at the time, remembered the day his mother brought home a bag of dried fish. "Eat as much as you want," she told him. One woman remembered waiting all night with her grandmother for bread with their ration coupon. She spoke of the crush of desperate bodies and stolen coupons. In December of 1947 the ruble was devalued and inflation took off. Poverty was widespread; finding work was difficult.

In part because of the destruction of the war, there was a shortage of adequate housing. Living space per resident declined throughout the 1940s. Most urban housing was in the form of communal apartments, where families lived together and shared the

kitchen and bathroom. In Moscow in 1947 a significant proportion of the population lived without running water, sewerage, or central heating. Outside of Moscow the situation was even more dire. (Filtzer 2006; Manley 2006) In the countryside, many people had lost their homes. They dug out shelter in the ground or in a hillside and lived in these dugouts.

The war had interrupted education. The eldest of this generation started school and then stopped for the duration of the war. Others started late. Schools were overcrowded and undersupplied. One man restarted school in the second grade in October 1945 at 13 years old, although “there was nothing to write with, no blackboard, nothing.” He said, “We would gather and tell each other stories, there was nothing else to do.” Another wrote in the margins and spaces of newspapers with a sunflower stalk. “There wasn’t anything—whatever the teacher said, that is what we memorized.” An entire class shared one primer; students sat four to a desk. Elementary education was four class years. “Incomplete secondary education” was seven years, and that only became compulsory in the late 1950s[10]. After seven years, students might continue their studies at a vocational technical school, a *tekhnikum*, a trajectory encouraged under Khrushchev. Higher education was available to those with “complete secondary education”, or ten class years. However, many of this generation went to work in factories after only four or seven years of schooling. They sacrificed their education to fight fascism and build socialism.

The stories of Lyudmila and Viktor illustrate well how these early memories influenced experience during the early 1990s.

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[10] “Complete secondary education”, or 10 class years, was made compulsory only in 1981.

Lyudmila

The father of Lyudmila died before the war in 1938, when she was two years old. They lived in Kaluga *Oblast'*, to the southwest of Moscow. "We were six children and mama raised us alone. She worked in the technical school and as a person of the steppe[11]." They were forced to evacuate 50 kilometers southeast as the Germans advanced in the fall of 1941, losing their cow in the process. Lyudmila would have been five years old then and she remembered waiting in a ditch for older evacuees to bring back food as German shells exploded, raining debris on them. Separated from their mother, some of the children temporarily resettled in a village that was shelled.

> Oh, there we stayed in some sort of house going to pieces. Oh, glass flew and everything there. Somewhere a shell would explode, and it is propulsive. It gives off propulsions. The glass flew and everything on the face of the earth…

As the Germans retreated in early 1942 they burnt villages. Not one house was left standing in Lyudmila's home village. When she and her family returned, they dug out the *samovar*[12]. Lyudmila's mother had buried and built a clay-walled dugout. They were poor and hungry. After school, Lyudmila worked on the collective farm where she turned hay and transported it by horse and cart. She hauled water and firewood for her mother. Lyudmila and her sister went to festivals in other villages to beg and gather the frozen potatoes that had been left in the fields during the winter. Her mother made potato cakes from them. They collected horse sorrel, an edible weed related to buckwheat. "We walked through the field collecting sorrel. We collected sorrel, we picked it. Oh! We ate

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[11] She meant something akin to homesteader.
[12] A *samovar* or "self boiler" is a giant tea kettle of sorts with a spigot to pour the tea.

grass." They used sorrel to make cakes but Lyudmila remembered, "They are dry, you can't swallow them." There were no winter coats and no shoes.

> We were destitute, destitute. Lord, we walked around in winter, walked, skinny, and we had no shoes to walk in! And we wore foot wrappings and those foot wrappings came out through holes when we walked.

After Lyudmila finished seventh grade at eighteen years of age she moved near her sister in Moscow *Oblast'* where she worked as a manual laborer in construction, living in a dormitory. She dug trenches, hauled mortar, and unloaded sand and stone chippings by the truckful at night. In winter they broke up frozen sand in order to unload it. After a year she transferred to a mechanics factory in a nearby city. She was married and had a daughter, who was raised by Lyudmila's mother from eight months old until she was seven. Then Lyudmila struggled to work two shifts and care for her daughter while her "hooligan" husband drank. She thought her personal life had not gone well, but she spoke fondly of her work.

> I was among the best workers, I was on the […] factory honor role, I was. I had very good responsiveness. With work, with work I did very well.

She remembered the time her pension was to be 132 rubles.

> We figured out everything about the pension. It was enough for us. And when we would go on the pension. We will work, [then] we'll retire. It was enough for us. All of us saved for our funeral. And it was adequate, enough. A 132 ruble pension and here [then] sausage was two rubles [per kilogram] and meat two rubles. But then suddenly it was all over. And it turned out there was no manner of pension.

Fifteen years after her savings evaporated, which represented approximately three years of her pension at the time, she is waiting for it to be reimbursed. "I had five thousand in savings. So far nobody has returned it to me." Lyudmila's daughter, who was present during the interview, asked her mother, "What will they return to you? Are you still…" Lyudmila interrupted,

> No, now they are paying in full. I was talking with [a friend]. She said her aunt signed up for three thousand in old money. Then when they paid it out, then it came to sixteen. Instead of three it came to sixteen. At first they gave by one thousand. Then they decided to return all of it. But how they returned it all, with a percentage [interest] or how, I don't know. So I have five thousand somewhere, and I don't know how much they will return to me. Will they return five thousand or even more?

She will likely never receive her five thousand rubles, which in 2007 was only worth about two pension months. When Sveta asked her what was the most important thing in her life Lyudmila said, "Oh, to rest […] To rest a little." Sveta asked her where, but Lyudmila wasn't referring to a vacation. "Well, to not work. Yes, if only to not work. If only. But by the look of it, it won't happen for me. Probably while my legs still go, as long as I don't crumple, then probably, that's it." At 70 years old Lyudmila is still working in the factory.

Viktor

Both of Viktor's parents went to the front in 1941 when he was still an infant. His mother left immediately on June 22 as she was with the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (the *NKVD*, precursor to the Committee for State Security, or *KGB*) and ran 11 reconnaissance missions in the enemy's rear. His father left in August. He and his grandmother returned to her village in southeastern Ukraine. He vaguely remembers his grandmother pulling him, along with a rooster, in a wagon across a small bridge. This was about the time the Germans were advancing on Kharkov in northeast Ukraine, the largest Soviet city the Germans took during the war. A German shell hit the bridge and the wagon overturned. He and the rooster ended up in the water below, and his grandmother jumped in after them. Later she would tease him about jumping in for the

rooster. At six years old, Viktor began work on the collective farm as a cowherd grazing calves. Those were the years of famine; the collective farm was how Viktor and his grandmother survived. “I remember my first work days. They didn’t give us wheat. A little corn, seeds, four oil cakes or mill cakes, as we called them then, two cans of milk. I was a shepherd, a little shepherd. […] Those were my workday payments.”

His mother returned from the war, demobilized in 1948, but his father, who survived, did not return to the family. He remembers childhood fights where he threaten other children, “I’ll tell my papa” and the other children replied, “You don’t have a papa.” When his mother remarried he went out into the street and told his playmates, “Well now I have a real papa.” In 1952 his family moved to Sevastopol where 11 people lived in a three room communal apartment. Viktor finished seventh grade and began work in a factory. He continued his schooling at night and became a secondary school history teacher. This is how he described his generation.

> In history our generation is called the generation of the victors, because our fathers were victorious and we are the generation of victors, that is the generation [born] at the end of the 30s, 40s and even 50s—a few before the war, during the war and after the war. Our parents came back then, those whose parents did come back. I remember in our class there were 40 students in the first grade, and in response to the question of our teacher “Whoever has fathers, raise your hand”, only six or seven students raised their hands, no more. Even though there were children of different ages in the class, from seven through thirteen years of age. […] I remember, when we went to first grade, my [step]father took me by the hand and led me to school. That was one of my memorable days. I stood with pride and looked at everyone and thought, ‘You don’t have fathers, but I have one.’ Of course, that was all childish. But I was proud to have a father, because there were not many fathers, there were not. And that was the tragedy of my generation. And such a tragedy that revealed itself afterwards. Unfortunately, many men of my generation drank themselves to death. …That was the echo of war, so to speak, the echo of growing up without fathers, growing up without mothers.

Echoes of war

It may seem strange to begin a dissertation on the recent Russian mortality crisis with the Great Patriotic War. However, those at greatest risk of dying were born in the years 1936 through 1951. They were the generation of victors Viktor describes above. Even those that were born after the war started their lives under the shadow of the war. The war exacted a tremendous Russian sacrifice, a sacrifice that has always been officially interpreted through the lens of a Russian victory over fascism. Vera, married to Viktor, asked, “How is it possible to forget the Great Patriotic War? When we won, and we are a victorious people. Is it even possible? All should bow before our mother Russia.” In this view Russia paid the price for an Allied victory, as only Russia could. Vera said, “And only we could have withstood such a war. Only we [could have], only we, the Russian people.” The sacrifices and deprivations of the 1940s were not in vain, at least not until the Soviet project failed.

Post-war demographics and gender

Many were not as lucky as Viktor, losing one or both parents in the war. In the years after the war Russia had almost 700,000 orphans who were raised in children’s homes. Viktor’s childhood coup, when he told his playmates that he had a “real papa”, reflects the demographic consequences of the war. An estimated 27 million people had died; three-fourths of whom were men (Zubkova 1998, 20). The state reacted to this demographic catastrophe by introducing the 1944 Family Law, which made divorce more

difficult and granted state aid to single mothers and mothers of three or more children. Any mother could place her children in a children's home and retrieve them at a later date (Bucher 2006, 14). In the same law, single mothers could no longer sue the father of their children for support (Bucher 2006, 15). Fathers were no longer officially required to take responsibility for offspring outside of marriage.

The state was intent on increasing the birth rate and replacing the population lost. As a side effect, fathers were divested of responsibility in the domestic sphere, although they did retain their role as breadwinner within marriage. Men were expected to bring home a paycheck; their social roles centered around work. As Viktor notes, the consequences of a fatherless generation were only fully revealed later and perhaps most fully in the early 1990s when men were unemployed, unpaid, or unable to adequately support their families financially. During those years, the breadwinner role itself was dealt a fatal blow.

Many women, even before the war, managed their households and worked as wage laborers without much help from men. Under Lenin's and then Stalin's push to industrialize the country women entered the workforce en masse during the 1920s. In 1939 women represented 39 percent of the workforce; at the end of the war they were 56 percent of the workforce, although this declined to some extent in the post-war years (Clements 1991, 271). Women's salaries, however, were less than men's throughout the Soviet years. Men were always regarded as the real breadwinners. Nonetheless, women fulfilled both productive and reproductive roles in society.

Professor Vladislav spoke of the faded image of men as saviors, an image promoted by Soviet war propaganda and one which retains little cultural currency. "The

war, yes, yes, yes. The man was the savior, you know there is the image of the Russian men-saviors, saviors. But not now. The woman was the guardian, the guardian of the family, children, homes.” According to Clements,

> In the iconography of the war, and undoubtedly in the minds of many Soviet soldiers, women came to stand for endurance, rebirth, and the tenderer emotions rare in the world of combat. Women as well must have drawn sustenance from this vision of themselves, for it honored their contribution to the war, justified their suffering, and legitimated their own deep feelings about their succoring role within the family and the community. (Clements 1991, 272)

At some point soon after the war, the image of Soviet men-saviors who sacrifice for the future of communism lost relevance in greater society. The ethic of sacrifice was preserved, but it was most relevant at home. “[T]he practice of self-sacrifice in favour of future generations became reoriented towards one’s own children” (Ledeneva 1998, 102). The image of men saviors eroded while the image of women guardians expanded into domestic martyrs[13] after the war. Sacrifice became the purview of women. Professor Vladislav thought that now “the woman must comfort, support, and sometimes save the man.” He, along with others, told me that the best men had died in the wars of the 20th century. Women became the saviors.

Sacrifice for a radiant future

The war and its aftermath are this generation’s point of departure and their earliest memories. Even for those born after the war, lives were measured against the war and its aftermath. They had not seen their circumstances worsen. They had only ever seen them

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[13] Du Plessix Gray (1991) refers to martyr-heroines, a play on the mother-heroines of Stalin’s years.

improve. The worst of Stalin's repression occurred before they were born. For most, the promises of Soviet socialism rang true during their formative years and through the 1960s. A radiant future was possible, based on the incredible rate of progress in rebuilding western Russia after the war. "Well, we lived in hard times, all the population lived in hard times, but somehow we lived, found work and all the time thought that it will be better, that there will be improvement. [...] We lived with such instilled hopes." And another woman remembered, "We thought that now there is poverty, now we will endure, but afterwards we will live [...] It seems to me that everyone thought it would be better."

When the Soviet Union fell and much of the Russian population was thrust into poverty, this generation would recall the Great Patriotic War and its aftermath.[14] When Sveta asked Lyudmila about the early 1990s, Lyudmila spoke again of the poverty of her youth. Sveta tried to clarify, "But that was before, right? Not after perestroika." Lyudmila said, "Well, but afterwards too. How we didn't have anything. People were also frayed [in reference to clothing]." She continued by telling a story about needing a winter coat in the late 1940s. To Lyudmila, economic shock therapy looked like war-ravaged Russia. In a terrible sense it was as if the poverty of her youth and the poverty of the early 1990s had merged together. Thirty-five years of her life, from age nineteen when she started work in the mechanics factory to age fifty-five when the Soviet Union fell, were overshadowed. Her marriage had not gone well, but she had been proud of her work in the factory. Yet she would end life where she began it—in poverty. Many in this

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[14] Filtzer (2002) argues that this generation was beset by a "deep crisis of morale" and alienation which lasted into the post-Stalin years. While my respondents remembered the war and its aftermath as difficult, for many of them things improved in the 1950s. Filtzer seems to be writing about those born slightly earlier than my sample, from 1925-1935. There is also a class difference at play—as Filtzer pays particular attention to orphans and the rural.

generation were forced to reevaluate their past during the early 1990s. Their lives circled around to the poverty of their youths, which they believed they had overcome together through sacrifice and hard work.

Everywhere this generation was confronted by scenes they could only comprehend as analogous to the postwar years. One man described his impressions upon seeing street children in the early 1990s. “At the train stations, in every underground space, it was as if, the impression was that suddenly a war had ended, just like when our war ended or even before the war ended….” At least twice in 2007, walking through informal markets outside metro and train stations, where individuals sold various odds and ends laid out on tarp or overturned crates, Margarita told me with some disgust, “It is just like after the war.” And then she would add—half angry, half baffled—“But there was no war.” And certainly there was no victory. The 57 year old taxi driver I interviewed said, of those older than himself, “They will never understand what happened. No war, nothing and everything fell apart.”

Sacrifice was central to Soviet citizenship. The Soviet state made constant use of the notion of sacrifice to goad the population to rebuild the country and ensure the radiant future of communism. When that future was lost it was as if the war and the sacrifices to build socialism were in vain. “What did the people fight for? But now look at what is being done!” The sacrifices they had made—in lives, housing, education, and labor—were no longer worthwhile.

Collectivity

While this generation recalled the war during the early 1990s, for them the late 1940s was essentially different from the early 1990s, however much the hardship and poverty seemed comparable. Vera described herself and her husband, as “children of the war.” She lost her father during the war, yet she said, “I remember those years like a wonderful, beautiful dream. No, no, no, I don’t want to say that, but somehow…We lived in concert [*druzhno*].” Vera used a word derived from the root word friend. It could also be translated as unity, but I want to preserve the sense of the collective as a group of individuals who work together for some end, rather than the sameness implied by unity. One woman, who lived in Kazakhstan during and after the war, said, “And you know, despite these hardships, we lived, we lived somehow very harmoniously [*druzhno*], very harmoniously, and we tried to help one another.” She spoke of Kazakh and Russian children sharing an apple or dried mare’s milk cheese. “We didn’t disdain each other.” This time was special, “even a happy time for mama and all those relatives [who had fled eastward from the front].”

During interviews individuals struggled to describe the society in which they came of age, one that no longer exists. Soviet society was a “tight society”; “we all lived alike.” Vera said, “We lived in concert […] Now, of course, we are upset. […] We are very upset that we are strangers in one country—strangers.” She referred to the political party of Putin and Medvedev, United Russia with irony: “What sort of United Russia? It is funny to even say it, and I don’t want to say it.” Although at first she hesitated to say it, Vera thinks Russia needs another 1941.

> Truly we need another war in order to unite us, so that we are together. But now, what disorder! Neighbor doesn't know neighbor. That's just, that's just…That's a catastrophe. It's really scary! How can it be so? Sorrow unified people, they were together, holidays together. And now we don't know each other. Is that really good? A person dies—we don't know about it.

According to Vera, war is the only way to bring Russians together. "We're that type of people," she said.

These memories made claims about the true Russian character—"that type of people." Viktor said, "We love to be a collective. And we tear ourselves apart. You should never break tradition, do you understand? Yes, individuality is also necessary to nurture, but we are Orthodox and that is solidarity, solidarity [*sobornost'*]." Viktor used a Russian word which comes from the root *sobor*, meaning both cathedral and assembly or gathering. Boym notes that the word is an "untranslatable antipode to the Western concept of the individual and identity" (1994, 87). Viktor considers collectivity or solidarity an essential Russian quality, deep and spiritual in nature. His meaning is clear. What is happening now is not Russian. He derides the reintroduced Day of Unity on November 4, a day plagued by nationalist demonstrations. "Unity between whom?" Viktor asks.

> Unity-holiday, and the whole month they tootled to us about the Bolsheviks, how bad Stalin was. They showed films and on the fourth of November again films about the bad Bolsheviks. […] That was on the day of Unity. Do you understand? As a historian I was ashamed. Do you understand? Ashamed, ashamed. Then there was unity.

Memories are socially constructed. The Soviet state legitimated and crafted memories of the war and the post-war period. Moreover, accounts of middle-aged Muscovites are laced with nostalgia. Connerton notes that "images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order" (1989, 3). However, in the case of older Muscovites,

memories often serve to comment critically on the present social order. As seen above, one way they do this is to emphasize collectivity in the past, focusing on the war and the radiant future. They exclude sentiments of individuality, inequality, or conflict which are reserved for characterizing the present. Beyond the question of whether memories objectively reflect the past, they surely reflect something about the post-Soviet experience for this generation. That experience is marked not by a feeling of social disenfranchisement.

A feeling of collectivity is undoubtedly part of their early experiences, forged through the war and the difficult years after the war. People shared struggles to feed themselves, house themselves, educate themselves and secure a better standard of living. The state provided a master narrative of progress: the radiant future of Soviet communism came only after sacrifice and hardship. Indeed sacrifice and hardship resonated with people's experiences. The destruction of the war and the destitution of post-war Russia meant that hardship and sacrifice were a daily reality. Whether or not they interpreted these as furthering socialism was another thing. But as people's lives improved, the radiant future was believable—the master narrative continued to reflect experience. The rhetoric of the state gave meaning to people's experiences.

It is sometimes thought that Soviet propaganda rarely meant anything to ordinary citizens. Or, conversely, that people believed it uncritically because they had no other information available to them. Neither of these is a fair account. As anywhere, people internalize messages that resonate with their experience. For many of this generation, the message of sacrifice followed by a brighter future did correspond to their experience. In most cases, their quality of life was vastly superior to that of their parents.

According to many informants, now there is no more radiant future. Where society is going is unclear to them. A female defense worker lamented:

> And what we have now, I don't even know. There is no ideology now, nothing to aim for. Before we had that we were aiming for communism. How was it? Well we had some sort of dream that there would be communism, meaning that it will be better and better. Although it seemed as if the lines were getting longer, but all the same we thought that all of that was temporary. Afterwards it will be better. Work! We are going towards a radiant future. But now it is unclear where we are going.

A male engineer spoke of the collective that was knit together during Soviet times. This generation is no longer unified by participating in a big social project. "But now they have torn everyone apart. Everyone has disbanded. Everyone has once again begun to work to survive. Each one for himself and the culture of consumption." People are much more concerned with securing their own lives. Another man similarly told me that everyone wants "to live their own private lives." A lack of ideology "makes society impersonal and soulless." Another male engineer concurred:

> When we started to build socialism and then communism people at least knew what they were building. Now nobody knows what they are building in Russia, and there is not one slogan—'Let's build capitalism.' Nobody says that we are building capitalism even though we have the most bandit capitalism that ever was in 18th century Europe.

There is no state ideology to give people a sense of connection, even through opposition. Instead there is the market, and it unabashedly promotes difference.

Order and space

Professor Vladislav, who headed the institute where I was affiliated during my stay in Moscow, told me:

> I myself remember […] the wartime generation of Russians, who lived through the war—men and women. They had, naturally, different fates, they came through that war in different ways. But those people, you know, they had a beautiful identity, a social identity. They understood what it was to be Russians. They understood what the government was, what they were responsible for. They answered not only for their family. They were ready to answer, especially men, for the situation around them.

Professor Vladislav was perhaps speaking of his parents' generation here, but it is likely some of that social identity, based on an awareness of what had been fought for and what was being built, was imparted to the next generation. The Great Patriotic War became a central aspect of Soviet identity. "For the majority of post-war citizens, being Soviet was easy… 'Sovietness' was a natural attribute of all those who had fought in the war, either actually at the front or metaphorically on the 'home front,' and survived" (Fitzpatrick 2006, 272).

Particularly during the late 1940s the Soviet state was reasserting itself. Stalin used the war to galvanize his version of the Soviet project. Central ideology, organization, and control were tightened.[15] This period of time was arguably the height of the Soviet state, but it also contained the seeds of individuality and collectivity apart from the state. Children of the war were inculcated in the morality of sacrifice but also independence and spontaneity, as the state struggled with "reconciling order and heroism" (Livschiz 2006, 204). In her seminal literary analysis, Vera Dunham wrote about early yearnings for freedom after the eye-opening experiences of the war. The desire for more freedom was contained by the state through a "Big Deal" permitting moderate middle-class materialism in exchange for continued support of the regime (Dunham 1976). More recently historians have argued that the general population was

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[15] This meant renewed persecution for some groups. In particular this time period saw state persecution of Jews, intellectuals and students of higher education.

much too destitute to yearn for anything other than to rebuild their individual lives (Zubkova 1998; Filtzer 2002). But as they rebuilt their lives, aspirations did surface. The radiant future began to apply to individual lives as well as the communist project, and the state tolerated this development. Fürst (2006a) recognizes this time as the maturation of the Soviet state and claims that the reassertion of state control coincided with growing individuality[16]. "Thus, precisely in the regime's highly developed sense of control rests the very possibility to avoid, undermine and reinterpret" (Fürst 2006a, 12). They became proficient at negotiating between state structure and individual action.

At least retrospectively, the informants of this study found the roots of their social identity in the war and post-war years, notwithstanding that they themselves were too young to serve. At the same time, after the war people's aspirations for their own radiant future exceeded the state's ability to deliver. In the war are the seeds of the paradox of space for individual agency potentiated by state order.

According to Livschiz the solution to reconciling order and heroism (individuality) was found in the promotion of "love for labour and work that emerged as a key theme and ultimate demonstrator of patriotism and peacetime heroism" (Livschiz 2006, 204). The two dimensions of order and space had their roots in the war but were later epitomized in the workplace. At work, individuals were integrated into the state's industry and bureaucracy. Work helped organize social relationships that circumvented and co-opted state control and structure. In the next chapter we will turn to work to

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[16] Fürst also sees the generation that came of age then as "squeezed between the dominant myths of war and Thaw and located on the watershed between two distinct periods in Soviet history…In short: a generation that was on a permanent search of itself and its place in the system they lived in" (2006b, 225). It seems she is referring to those born in the 1920s and 1930s.

understand the intertwined relationship between order and space during this generation's working years.

Being unneeded

The chaos and poverty, panic and despair of the early 1990s had only one historical parallel for this generation. But this analogy with postwar Russia brought with it a terrible reckoning—it was as if all of their life efforts from the war onwards had been futile. Viktor, the secondary school history teacher, expressed it thus:

> I became unnecessary [*ne vostrebuemym*] to the state. History is not needed. […]We ourselves walked through that history. We didn't need to go through the war. We didn't need to go through collective farms. We didn't need to go through it—how we labored in the factories. Almost all of my generation after seventh grade left for the factories, and some even earlier after fourth grade. We went through that, and in 1954, 1956 we went to Virgin Lands[17], to all those projects. We are history. We apprehended this history not only in school, but we believed it. Yes, we really believed in that radiant future. We believed, we believed.

Viktor and Vera console themselves that their students still come to see them, to ask advice, and to borrow books. Vera said, "We are still sought-after [*vostrebovany*] by our students." Both Viktor and Vera use forms of the word *vostrebovannyi* which has the sense of being in-demand, sought-after, necessary, or useful. Those that are not *vostrebovany* are dispensable, expendable, and unneeded.

There was another expression with a similar meaning which was much more common: needed by nobody. It is clumsy to translate but it is central to the story of the demographic crisis in the early 1990s. The phrase has been included in other ethnographies of Russia. Rethmann notes how the Koriaks of northern Kamchatka

[17] This is another reference to Khrushchev's Virgin Lands Campaign. See footnote above.

peninsula use it daily to mean "nobody needs us, we are worthless" (Rethmann 1999, 205). She writes, "Koriaks' convictions that they do not matter lead to self-neglect and outbursts of pain, soothed only by radical bouts of drinking" (205). *Needed by Nobody* is Höjdestrand's ethnography of the homeless in St. Petersburg.

> Once I began my fieldwork in St. Petersburg in 1999, I heard the phrase "needed by nobody," *nikomu ne nuzhen*…more or less every day. "Needed by nobody" is a set expression that conveys the worthlessness or rejection of something or someone. It can be used disparagingly to belittle others or…to convey subjective feelings of loneliness and vulnerability. As the logic goes, those who are not needed are, in Douglas's terms, matter out of place, dirt embodied, for real human beings are by definition immersed in social webs of mutual responsibility and protection. (Höjdestrand 2009, 2)

In her conclusion Höjdestrand acknowledges "most Russians in the 1990s were in a manner of speaking, homeless" (2009, 195). Being unneeded expresses social exclusion, as Höjdestrand has shown in the case of homelessness.

For my informants, many of whom still had some close social relationships, being unneeded expressed a particular type of social isolation. It is the result of no longer having much to offer others. This was a terrible position for a generation who had been brought up in hardship with an ethic of mutual sacrifice during and after the war. Officially this mutual sacrifice was for the greater good of the state's population. Unofficially mutual sacrifice was practiced in networks of social relationships which served to circumvent the state. In the late 1980s these social networks would have been broadest for the generation of victors after two or three decades working. Their own children were establishing themselves. They were on the cusp of retirement. They were in the position to make things happen—for themselves, yes, but even more importantly, for others around them. Then, almost overnight, their social webs contracted; their work and

retirement were no longer certain. They could hardly help their own children. "Nobody needs us," they said again and again. What they meant was we have nothing to offer.

Viktor thought even their history was no longer needed—the war, collectivization, factory work, and labor projects. Their past was diminished. The future was "no more" (Yurchak 2006). It was a consolation that Viktor and Vera were still of some use to Viktor's students who came to ask advise and borrow books. "It means a lot," Vera said. Multiple times during the interview with Sveta, Vera said that she and Viktor were thankful their students remembered them. "Thank you students, for not forgetting." It was not purely about remembering, though. It was also about the fact that the students came for advice and borrowed books. "Books are our riches," Vera said. They might not be able to offer much, but tea and books were within their means.

Social isolation has serious emotional and physical health consequences. Being unneeded meant "hurt and pain" (Rethmann 1999, 205) and "loneliness and vulnerability" (Höjdestrand 2009, 2). Without anything to offer others, their power to act socially in constructive ways was curtailed. There were few remedies available. Individuals might try to retain some sense of being social actors through destructive acts—drinking, crime, even suicide. Or they might seek to reestablish relationships of mutual interdependence. In a true tragedy, men seeking a lost sense of connectedness often turned to alcohol to find it again. Being unneeded is how many middle-aged Russians experienced the early 1990s. Being unneeded is also why some of them did not survive those years.

The echo of war in mortality

Some scholars interpret the age distribution of excess deaths as the impact of early childhood experience on mortality. Demographers Anderson and Silver (1989) find elevated cohort mortality for Russian men and women born during the war, especially those in the west. There is literature suggesting that risk of cardiovascular disease is, in part, determined by early experience, even as early as fetal and infant growth (Barker 2001). In general this cohort had restricted diets when they were young and poor diets thereafter. Men smoked and drank heavily throughout their lives. Biological vulnerability may indeed be a part of the story of the Russian mortality crisis, but these vulnerabilities are compounded and mitigated throughout the life course. It is also true that biological vulnerabilities and their life course histories are the bodily imprints of larger political-economic processes.

This chapter has touched on early hardships suffered by the generation of victors and the meaning given to these hardships in terms of sacrifice and collectivity. These meanings were promoted by the state but they were powerful precisely because they represented experience. These meanings, however, evolved through this generation's lives. Collective sacrifice for the radiant future of Soviet communism was displaced by collective sacrifice among family and friends. Older Muscovites, identified as victorious in Soviet history, attempt to reassert the meanings of sacrifice and collectivity through their memories of World War II. They do this against a strong tide that sees their sacrifices in terms of a failed project.

Chapter 7

Work

> We were sorry to lose everything that we had already acquired. What rich experience—it just seemed that we would still be needed [*nuzhny*].
>
> —interviewee

During the 1950s and 1960s the standard of living improved. It did seem as if the radiant future was coming. This chapter explores the role of work in the lives of this generation. Confrontations with new wealth redefine past labor. The experiences of Galina and Margarita illustrate some particularities, before introducing the theme of "socially-useful work" Work was the central way almost all citizens were integrated into the order of the state; yet, work was also how Muscovites acted collectively in space set apart from the state. Work gave people a sense of knowing each other and organized their social relations, *blat* among them. The practices of *blat* further reveal what it meant to be unneeded.

The good years

Most of this generation entered the workforce during the 1950s and 1960s after post-war reconstruction and during the scientific and technological revolution. The standard of living had likely returned to pre-war levels by 1950 (Filtzer 2002) and the economy began to expand. Schwartz's classic *The Soviet Economy since Stalin* (1965)

calls the late 1950s “the good years”. The Soviet Union made remarkable progress in military industry after the war, testing the atomic bomb in 1949 and the hydrogen bomb in 1953. In 1957, Sputnik 1 was launched into orbit; Yuri Gagarin became the first Russian astronaut in 1961. That same year Khrushchev predicted communism by the year 1980[18]. It was a heady time. Chubarov describes the political promises of that time as “overoptimistic, utopian objectives” (2001, 141). At the time most people took the promises to heart and dreamed of even better futures.

They saw that the standard of living was rising, part of the post-war Big Deal that exchanged middle-class materialism for continued support of the regime (Dunham 1976). In the decade from 1955 to 1965 a third of the population received newly constructed, if poorly constructed, accommodations, many of these private apartments (Filtzer 2006). This alleviated some crowding as people moved out of communal apartments. Even into the early 1970s people’s lives were improving, if slowly. During the late 1970s it was clear the economy had stagnated. Shortages and queues made it clear to most people that the system was not working as it should. People made up for the deficiencies in the system by relying on personal connections to secure consumer services and goods.

The generation of victors grew up during a period of progress. By the later 1980s the youngest among them had worked for at least fifteen years. In the Soviet Union women could retire after twenty years; men could retire after twenty-five. The formal retirement ages were 55 and 60, respectively. Just as they were poised to reap the benefits of the system, the system unraveled. An employee in the defense industry, born in the early 1950s, explained:

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[18] Technically the Soviet Union never achieved communism. According to later Marxist-Leninism it was in a state of mature or developed socialism.

> And remember we always said that, let's say, our generation, generally those who were born in the 50s, the famine was over…we had passed through the war…We lived well on petrol dollars into the 70s. We entered work in good enterprises. We earned well, [had] interesting work. That is, it appeared as if we would be the first generation, that our life would go by without that [war, famine, poverty]…And suddenly, it was such a collapse at the peak of everything.

The experiences of Galina and Margarita illustrate two Soviet work histories and how the collapse irrevocably altered the expected future.

Galina

Galina was born in 1942 about 300 kilometers south of Moscow where her family was evacuated. After her father returned from the front the family lived in barracks. They were two adults and four children in one room. "They gave us the worst room in the barracks, the coldest. Our mattresses froze to the beds in the morning. We lived there, oh six, seven years." Two more girls were born and the family moved to one room in a house. The three oldest children moved out before the family received a three room apartment. Galina finished seven class years and in 1959, at the age of 17, she began work in a factory painting sewing machines in the paint and varnish section. For her work, which was classified as hard and harmful, she received 120 rubles a month in addition to cooking oil and milk.

In a few years she decided to go to an evening *tekhnikum* for further training in economics. While attending classes she worked in quality control at another factory which produced gate valves used in chemical processing. Her salary was only 60 rubles, but lunch was provided. After she received her diploma she was lucky to be promoted to an engineer-economist position at the factory. This raised her salary to 126 rubles per

month (90 rubles in salary plus 40 percent in bonus). "That was good money; a good thick winter coat cost 120 rubles." To Galina, work at the factory was marked by discipline and precision.

> I assessed the industrial capabilities of the factory, how much of what the factory could [produce], as far as everything was in the hands of economists, you know. They already saw where each configuration would lead, where each piece of equipment purchased [would lead]—in that everything was planned precisely […] In the factory everything was precisely counted, literally, and the factory was like…My father said it worked like a watch. It worked precisely. Understand me. We delivered equipment precisely; we executed our program precisely; if the program stalled we tried to get back on schedule within three shifts. But now I look…We were very highly disciplined: we came at eight o'clock, lunch at twelve, you didn't go out anywhere, understand? We were precise, nobody went anywhere. We were very disciplined, very disciplined. And now I don't observe that. A complete collapse, a complete collapse.

When perestroika began Galina was not against reform.

> When perestroika proclaimed a market economy we understood that there would be a market salary. That was the deception of the people—that a salary would be a proper salary. And they bought us on that. They deceived us on that. We thought there would be a big salary and we supported everything only because of that. Everyone thought the salary would be big. And once there is a big salary that means we will live better. But it turned out the opposite.

In 1992, at 50 years of age, Galina was three years away from retirement. That year the factory was privatized and Galina received shares in the enterprise; she used privatization vouchers to buy more shares for a total of forty-one shares, the maximum permitted. She was told they would be worth 400 thousand rubles. She was forced into early retirement in 1993, but for the first six months received only unemployment benefits. These payments were erratic and she and her husband, who had also lost his job at the same factory but without a pension, borrowed money from her retired sister in order to make ends meet. Her husband was fortunate enough to find work as a security guard. Technically Galina was not supposed to work as a retiree but she too was soon working.

> It was only possible to find work as a security guard or a cleaner because the factories everywhere were all in decline. There was a contraction in production. And through a connection I got a job in a college, I was a guard there and I cleaned the floors. That paid 400 rubles there or 400 thousand, now I don't know. It was in 1995. I've already forgotten the units […] and my pension was somewhere around 300 rubles in addition[19].

Three years after she was forced to retire from the factory, Galina returned in order to do something with her shares in the company[20]. She was shocked to see that the landscaped flower gardens had been overrun by wormwood plants and a birch tree was growing out of the roof over her former department. In better times, the factory director had told his employees that there was not a factory like it in America. "As a result, they plundered that factory, they took it away." With her forty-one shares she received 8000 rubles. She supplemented that amount and bought an automatic washing machine for 10,500 rubles.

Together Galina and her husband managed during this tumultuous time. Given they don't have any children, they are saving what they can for the day when one or both of them will not be able to work. There are no vacations; there is no cinema. They read detective books, watch television and do crossword puzzles in their free time. For most of their lives they worked under the expectation that they would become comfortable retired engineers with the means to enjoy yearly vacations. Under the Soviet system their pensions would have been equivalent to their salaries. "Of course they [retirees in Soviet times] lived much richer than we do. That is, our pension now is four or five times less [than what it would have been] and again the cost of living is such." In a matter of a few

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[19] Less than 200 U.S. dollars a month

[20] From 1992-1994 the Russian government began a deliberate process of selling off its assets. During this stage of privatization, free vouchers representing shares of state wealth were distributed to the population. They were then able to convert these to shares in privatized enterprises. Theoretically this strategy would keep assets from being concentrated in the hands of a few. It did not work out this way.

years they have become guard-janitors, worried about a day when they will no longer be able to work.

Margarita

Margarita was born in 1940 in a village in Moscow *Oblast'* where her father, who was involved in the 1930s development of Moscow City, built a house on a lot for his family before he died on the front in 1941. Margarita's mother rented out the lower level of the house to the Pioneer camp in the summer and the upper level to students the rest of the year. Margarita finished seven years of schooling and then enrolled in a four year day course at a *tekhnikum*. She graduated as a technician-mechanic for meat packaging machinery. She was assigned work at a meat packaging plant in a city about 400 kilometers northwest of Moscow but it turned out they had no opening. So she was told that she had "free choice." In other words, she had to find her own position. Wherever she went in Moscow she was turned away. Eventually she met a man in the village who worked as a manager in the pre-slaughter treatment section of a Moscow meat packaging plant. Margarita began to work as a store keeper in the cold room of the plant.

> Well, the meat comes from wagon, in the wagons, and the carcasses were already frozen. The carcasses were laid on trolley carts, there was a type of platform there, in the cold room of course. A track. The loaders were there at the platform. The loaders lifted those carcasses. They were such men, you understand. And there were these floor-mounted scales and you go up to where the plummets are, you set the weight. So as soon as they sent it, we weighed to know how much was in each wagon. And the men,

> whole brigades, carted [the carcasses] away in cars to the refrigerated rooms.

In time Margarita and two other women working as store keepers were sent for further training, given they were not working in their area of specialization. Margarita began working in the design division of the mechanical repair department with a new diploma in the assembly of screw-cutting lathes, but she didn't enjoy it. She considered her spatial perception poor and wanted to be a mechanic.

When she became pregnant in 1965 she went to the Regional Economic Council (*Sovnarkhoz*) and asked to be reassigned. In that same year the regional system of economic management was disbanded in favor of centralized ministries. She was told she could work at the State Committee on Material and Technical Procurement, but she would need to learn to type. She worked there for nine years, during which time she had her son, divorced her husband, and received a one-room apartment to the north of the city. After her maternity leave of four months she placed her son in a five day nursery. She picked him up Friday evenings and they spent the weekends together. She left the ministry in 1974 to work closer to home at a research institute for poultry-processing.

> The thing is, that when, before retirement it was mandatory to have a certain length of employment, mandatory that there was an uninterrupted period of work. That was what it was all about, do you understand? And I had in general, quite a normal salary. Before people lived…The most I received was 125, 130 at the institute where I worked. I received 130, and the biggest pension was 132. Do you understand 120, 132 and people lived very well you could say. But now…But now, how much? Everything [money] has changed by 1000 times, right? Well then, now my pension should be 13,000. That's what our pension should be. That's it, but we will not receive anything like that, we won't receive it and we aren't receiving it, so that's that. Oh, what a nightmare! But given I didn't have any savings anywhere, I didn't lose anything –"ever spare, ever bare." Ha, ha. I was living on my salary and so it's nothing. Perestroika or no perestroika it's all the same to me.

But it isn't the same. Immediately following this, she gave a nervous laugh as she recalled vouchers [for stocks in companies to be privatized]. She continued, "Michelle, how they deceived us, it is some kind of quiet horror! Oh, I can't. I need to throw away those pieces of paper [vouchers]. I still have them. Oh, what a nightmare, oh! Oh, horror, it is just, anyway it all needs to be …" She didn't finish. When I asked how she was deceived she told me that organizations should have exchanged the vouchers for cash. "And all of it disappeared, all of those organizations." She attempted to cash in her vouchers through the trade union with no luck. "What a joke! I came, oh, well I don't even want to talk about it. It's horrible how they messed with people's heads. Especially…oh it was terrible. Well all of that was just lost and good riddance. There was never any money, and there is none, and let there never be. So there!"

On her retirement pension she continued to work for an additional eight years in the boiler room of her housing complex. Her salary was 5500 rubles per month when she stopped. In 2007 her pension was 2500. She uses her pension primarily to buy food and medicine for high blood pressure. Public transportation is free. Fees on the apartment are discounted 50 percent by virtue of her status as a work veteran (she completed 20 years of uninterrupted service) and are further subsidized so she only pays 200 rubles a month. The telephone service is more expensive, but is also discounted 50 percent. She comforts herself, "In principle, you understand, in principle there are people who live worse, it isn't worth getting offended. Everything is okay now. In any case it won't get better. I'm old, not as bad off as others."

Like others in the previous chapter, when Margarita thinks of the new Russia she is reminded of her youth, after the war. This is when she lived in the village. She commuted back and forth from Moscow on the electric train. In the following she remembers a frozen body on the tracks below the platform and the odds and ends the poor and invalid sold around the station—"but that was after the war." In 2007 there were once again people selling around the station. "But now there are rich folks and again that garbage at our station."

> When I was seven, eight, nine, up until eleven years it was difficult. I walked to the train station in my wellies. And I remember we had a lot of water there, now everything is asphalt, but before as soon as it began to rain, you couldn't get through it. I walked on kerosene, we had kerosene cookers then, there was no gas there. […] I remember on the train. There weren't the automatic doors before [to enter the platform area] on the electric train, and they [the tracks] were just there, oh, horror! You go up on the platform and there is someone down below [a corpse], if they were frozen on…after the war—poverty and everything…they would take off the overshoes, the ankle boots. In a sense you could say they were stealing. And also at the station I remember they sold every sort of nonsense, there were a lot of poor, there were invalids, but that was after the war and then more or less…But now there are rich folks and again that garbage at our station. Some kind of horror! It is a silent horror. They sit, they swear, the grannies, the grampies and various women, and everything. Oh, again we've returned to the same thing, and they sell every sort of nonsense. Every piece of clothing, every old shoe. Oh, what is that?

"Socially-useful work"

Work was the one way almost all Soviet citizens were incorporated into the order imposed by the state and participated as citizens. Clarke explains that work was much more than a job in Soviet times.

> People's social benefits and entitlements, their rest and holidays, sporting and cultural activities, access to consumer durables, clothing and footwear,

> housing, heath care, education, and even food are all linked to their participation in the enterprise. The enterprise is the basis of the Soviet worker's social existence: most of the things provided through the enterprise cannot be acquired by any other means, so work defines the worker's identity in a much more fundamental way than it does in the capitalist world. (Clarke 1993, 24)

Work was a right. "In our generation's time, everyone received their passport [work history card] at sixteen years of age. Sometimes even at fifteen they were in the factory. If you weren't studying, you went to the factory." For those that graduated from a vocational technical school or a *tekhnikum*, employment was usually arranged for the graduates. The state provided a place for most members of society, although it might not have always been the place desired. Due to labor hoarding there was a constant labor shortage and little turnover. Loss of work—loss of a place in the social order—was rarely threatened.

The fact that the government guaranteed work to its citizenry is but one side of Soviet work. Work was also a social duty and responsibility. Through their work, individuals gave something back to the state and greater society. A younger man in his late 40s told me that many people were relieved when the state backed off from their lives. "Before they were constantly talking about the debt to the state, namely to the generations. And they [Soviet citizens] never refused, generally it was as if they heeded the debt." But most of those individuals I spoke with were not relieved when the state fell away. One woman spoke of work under the Soviet state thus:

> In a Soviet city, working people could get a job anywhere and God forbid you didn't work for ten days! They would carry you to work with a military escort. They wouldn't let you fall. That was the purchase then, that was what was good then—they wouldn't let you fall. You will work, whether you want that or not. You will feed society. You will feed your children. And not one poor woman, having even three, four children,

> feared that her children would die of hunger because there was a society that was obliged to answer, not only for yourself, but for others.

In this sense work was less of a right than an obligation. It was framed as a contribution to society.

An emphasis on socially-useful work applied to all work under the Soviet state. Socially-useful work was part of the state's greater project of building communism. The 1977 Constitution of the USSR, in part 2, chapter 7, article 60, included the directive: "It is the duty of, and matter of honor for, every able-bodied citizen of the USSR to work conscientiously in his chosen, socially useful occupation, and strictly to observe labor discipline. Evasion of socially useful work is incompatible with the principles of socialist society." In the *Encyclopedia of Soviet Life*, Zemtsov describes the official version of "socially useful work":

> Any work in socialist industry or agriculture that is officially presented as serving the common good. The phrase 'socially useful labor' is intended to contrast the virtue of labor performed in state-run enterprises (plants, factories, collective farms, or state farms) with the supposed social insignificance of the work carried out outside the system of state regulation and planning, on private agricultural plots, or in home crafts. Socially useful labor is portrayed as the basis of economic progress as well as the most important formative influence shaping the character of Soviet individuals. Labor outside the state sector is often held to be motivated by greed for personal gain even at the expense of the public. (2001, 299)

An interviewee reminisced of her childhood, "In those times there were beautiful people, who took part in social work, socially-useful work." She is referring to work under the Soviet system in contrast to work in the capitalist marketplace. The one is framed as collective contribution; the other as personal gain. According to Tatiyana even if people retained their work in the early 1990s it no longer gave much satisfaction "because it wasn't for anything. […] There wasn't anything to work for." Another interviewee agreed, saying, "We didn't have any goal to aim for." An ideology which framed

people's work as socially useful was missing. Working for personal profit does not have the same import.

The fact that work was a social right, indeed, a social obligation meant that many people felt as if they had a place in society and that it was useful, especially during the 1950s. Even if they did not feel this, most individuals participated in production in some form; therefore they had a role in society, however minimal or senseless. Vera commented, "If we were orderly [*poriadochnye*], there was work." The Russian word *poriadochnyi* denotes a person who is decent, respectable and clean-living—it is derived from the word for order—*poriadok*. When people suddenly lost their work in the early 1990s they were no longer part of the social order. According to Vera, orderly people who had worked their entire lives finished their days living with the homeless or thieves, or those that had not been part of the legitimate social order. Even if they were only threatened with losing their work, this effectively communicated that their contribution to society was no longer necessary. They were unneeded. Even their past labor was discredited.

Past labor, new wealth

In the early 1990s, a generation's labor was deemed insignificant. Vera and her husband Viktor worked as secondary school teachers and now live on their two meager pensions. Vera claims that this is all normal and they are not bitter. In the following Vera recounts seeing oligarch Iosif Kobzon[21] on television claim that he is rich because he

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[21] Iosif Kobzon is a Russian oligarch of Jewish descent who is famous for his Frank Sinatra style singing. He served as a member of parliament. There are suspicions that he is connected to the Russian Mafia.

worked his whole life. Vera and Viktor also worked their whole lives, but they are not rich. Vera thinks through the implications of Kobzon's claim.

> Listen to what Kobzon says on television, 'That is why I am so rich, so much money, because I worked my whole life.' And I say, didn't we work? […] We worked, and how we worked. We gave ourselves without holding back anything. That means we…It means [what Kobzon said] we didn't work if we didn't earn for ourselves. Yes, we don't have good apartments, or *dachas*, or cars, but for us that isn't the point. […] And money—we never chased after it, even though we had a wretched salary at school, you know yourself, and we earned a wretched pension. But we didn't even become bitter…ha, ha, ha. Nothing, it was normal. We don't curse anyone, no one. I think everything is normal, normal. We have an interesting, good life. And that our students don't forget us—that is like the measure of a teacher, right?

Not much later she comes back to Kobzon's claim that he is rich because he worked his whole life. "That we earned it, that two teachers earned that pension, it is almost funny! It is as if we really didn't work after all. I don't even want to think of it."

Under the new economic logic, if she and Viktor had worked, they would have something to show for it. Given they have very little, it is indeed as if they never worked. She says she does not want to think about it. And who would want their life's labor rendered invisible, insignificant, unacknowledged? But she does continue to think of it. Below is another portion of her interview with Sveta. Here she rejects Kobzon's claim completely. She wants Sveta to know that their work developed Russia and yet they have nothing. Instead the younger generation benefits.

> Vera: Someone, really, forgive me, deals in millions, and someone is in poverty. And they say we have poor and rich like we had rich and poor—and so they have remained. But what did my husband and I earn? A beggarly pension but we both worked at a school. It is good that we can still sort of finagle a bit somehow. I will never accept this time, no…

> Sveta: It is interesting…
> Vera: And I am hurt, I am hurt, for children, for grandchildren, for your young generation, although you are conforming, conforming. Well and how else? Of course…
> Sveta: There isn't an alternative. We don't have an alternative.
> Vera: And so I don't judge you […] The older generation had already gained something for itself…
> Sveta: Of course, of course.
> Vera: But nothing more comes of that for us. Nothing at all. But you [the young] are still living on what our generation built.
> Sveta: Well of course, yes.
> Vera: Thus far you haven't really created anything. That is why I'm hurt. Didn't we do something?

In Soviet times each new generation was indebted to the proceeding generations' sacrifices and labor. Each new generation repaid this debt through their own sacrifices and labor in the name of a brighter future for the succeeding generations. This logic no longer holds. Instead the younger generations are free to do work that is "for personal gain even at the expense of the public" (Zemtsov 2001, 299). Viktor, Vera's husband, was forceful on this point, although he gave credit to the war generation: "I repeat all of present day democratic Russia, all of her economy, rests on what that generation built. Do you understand? Your grandmothers, my parents, do you understand?" The war generation and the 'generation of victors' are not given credit for their contribution to the development of Russia. In fact they feel accused of leading Russia astray.

> And now they say: 'So you were communists. Bad.' So they plant in people's hearts that your past is 'down the drain', that whatever you labored at didn't make the grade. That you fought for the country…What kind of country did you fight for?

It is clear to people that wealth in the new Russia is not a result of hard work. Viktor told Sveta:

> Here as the result of privatization we have a group [of oligarchs], well we even know [them], Sveta, you and I. We can count that group on one hand,

> right? For peanuts or for nothing at all, they took colossal natural riches. […] Abramovich, Khodorkovsky, Fridman[22] in some five or six years: about 18 or 15 million.

Lyudmila, who continues to work past her expected retirement, had this to say about new wealth and work:

> Abramovich is thirty years old. He already has millions of dollars, billions. Has he worked for thirty years? I am seventy, I work, I haven't rested a day. I work. I can't save for that, for my funeral. I work every day and I work even until I'm seventy years old. And he's thirty. He already has billions? How can you not notice that?

She thought all of the rich were thieves, "because the capital was stolen from the beginning." The idea that honest, hardworking people are financially rewarded by their length of service is now a transparent fiction. Another man complained,

> But people who worked honestly and so on—they suffered the biggest loss, the biggest loss. Now work honestly and they look at you like you're an idiot! […] So work has lost its meaning as work.

Work has lost its meaning because the value of work has to a large degree been supplanted by the value of money.

Knowing people

The "complete collapse" Galina refers to above was not merely a collapse of industrial production—it was a collapse of moral order over time, space and lives—when trees and people had their proper places at the factory. She tells Sveta that Jorge is now director of the factory.

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[22] Abramovich, Khodorovsky, and Fridman are all Russian oligarchs. Abramovich and Fridman are still worth billions, but Khodorovsky is serving a sentence in prison camp and his fortune has reportedly dwindled. Khodorovsky was imprisoned on charges of fraud, and the oil company he controlled, Yukos, was forced into bankruptcy over purported tax evasion and seized by the state. The state sponsored attack on the company is widely interpreted as Putin's attempt to reassert power over the oligarchs and business elite.

> He's the director of the factory. He arrived from Mexico. Here is what I heard from his biography. He's Russian. His father was a diplomat in Chile. He [the father] is Russian. His mom is Russian and his father dies. He [Jorge] was five years old. Mom marries a Chilean and he [the Chilean step-father] gives him his surname, his first name. He becomes Jorge. And here's what they say about him: that he killed that father [the Chilean step-father]. His mother dies and he kills that father […] and with that money he arrives in Russia and somehow he is the owner of the factory of our patron.

Patron is not a common way of referring to a Soviet-era factory boss. Galina had already referred to her former boss as "director" in the interview. As in English, the word patron implies a personal relationship of support and encouragement, not merely a professional relationship. Patron is used in contrast to the new director Jorge. Galina says Jorge is Russian, but he has a foreign name, and by using only his first name, Galina emphasizes his foreignness. When she refers to the old director she uses his last name, as is customary. Whoever he is and whatever he did, Jorge symbolizes the immorality of the new order. The story is compelling in post-Soviet Russia. Jorge acquired money to buy the factory through patricide—a highly immoral act. Jorge's patricide also stands in for the casting away of the older Russian generations. Jorge uses his step-father's money to become owner of the factory. Jorge is Russian but in many ways he is not. He has a foreign name, lived in a foreign land, and had a foreign step-father.

Jorge, like all "new Russians[23]," is both Russian and not Russian—a different Russian who appeared in the early 1990s and did not fit into the Soviet order. In the early 1990s, Russians began to refer to the "nouveaux riches." There was an implication that this money was acquired through criminal activities, and the term itself sometimes served as a euphemism for the mafia. In the later 1990s "nouveau riche" evolved to "new

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[23] For more on the terms "nouveau riche" (the French term is used in Russian) and new Russian (*novyi ruskyi*) and their evolution see: Balzer 2003; Graham 2003; and Humphrey 2002.

Russian." The term no longer implies the criminality that "nouveaux riches" did, but it provides a label for those with money and a showy lifestyle. Older Russians still refer to the rich as "new Russians." Once, driving amongst *dachas* on the outskirts of Moscow, we asked a Russian working in his garden how to get back to the highway. "Go straight ahead and turn right at the *dacha* of the 'new Russians.'" He smiled ironically. "You do know who 'new Russians' are?" We did and we also knew to turn right when we saw the large villa up the road. For some, these new Russians are still difficult to "know." They are a different Russian altogether. Their motivations and intentions are slightly obscure.

This sense of not knowing people was commonplace during the early 1990s. It did not only apply to those who had money. There was a general uncertainty about who people really were and who they would become during the early 1990s. Viktor described a sense of betrayal as people he had known suddenly became drugoi—other, different, new. Viktor, besides being a secondary school history teacher, was a military officer and secret member of the Committee for State Security (KGB). Below he refers to his state security colleagues.

> Do you know how hard it is to watch the treason of many? When we were together? We sat together, as we say, at one desk. Together we had those shoulder boards, everything And suddenly a completely different person. Do you understand? Another [person]. That's it.

Employees of the state security agency would have been scrambling to remake themselves in the early 1990s, however this theme of not knowing other people surfaced in many of the interviews. It is intimately connected to work—and not just work for the security forces.

Through work, the Soviet state gave people a place in society and enabled them to know others in society. There was a sense of order. When Sveta asked Galina if social

relations had changed Galina spoke about the factory, "When I worked there, in the factory, I walked in the whole department and I could paint you a picture [of the people], but now it is very hard for me to say." She thinks this may be due to a "degradation of morals." Margarita also has trouble knowing what people are up to in the new Russia. When I asked her what people did to relieve stress, she said she had no idea. Instead she spoke about neighbors who drink, spit, and do not greet her—"whatever they want they do." Then she turned to the subject of work.

> Before there were the mill operators and the lathe operators [at the meat packaging plant] and everything, everything worked normally. Lord, and now, I simply don't know. Well, when we worked, even at the institute, we went to the collective farm. We harvested potatoes in the fall. We harvested beets, carrots, cabbage. […] And now nobody does anything. I don't know who does what. I can't imagine. I don't know. They play those automatic casino games.

Margarita finds it difficult to know what people are doing these days, when everyone does "whatever they want." In Soviet times, people knew each other through work—socially-useful work. The youth volunteer work brigades she refers to were perhaps the purest, most idealistic version of work under the Soviet system, unremunerated and collective. Even at the factory Margarita knew who did what. "And everything, everything worked normally." But now even her neighbors are strangers. Margarita cannot even imagine what they might do with their time. It seems to Margarita that nobody does anything. It is true that unemployment levels are likely high in the Moscow *Oblast'* town where she lives, given that the poultry-processing institute is no longer able to provide as many jobs. People do "whatever they want," and she gives an example that is the antithesis of socially-useful work—gambling. Margarita attributes her loss of

bearings to a loss of morals—instead of working for society people are gambling.

Another interviewee concurred:

> Well the communist system was a little better. Well there was a little more order there. This new system—we cannot. Now there are neither capitalists nor communists. There's nobody. Well, that system seemed to keep stable, that form. People worked. They understood more about people. Now look! Maybe it will rectify itself. Now there is less respect for people, more rudeness. Nobody was rude but they worked then. When they worked there was a supervisor, there were deputy commissioners, party commissioners, everything. If something wasn't going right for a person they would help, in some measure, something. Somehow they related better to a person, of course better than now.

When older Russians speak about the difficulty of knowing other people and what they do, they are commenting on the demise of formal and informal social relations organized around occupation. These relations positioned people in networks of social intercourse and exchange.

Work and social relations

Much has been written from political-economic and historical viewpoints about the transformation of labor relations during the early 1990s in Russia. In Soviet times managers and workers were mutually dependent on each other. Managers needed cooperative workers in a context of a labor shortage while workers needed managers for housing, healthcare, holidays and access to consumer goods. It was in the interest of both to set production goals low and fulfill them. Informal relations and loose alliances between different levels of workers and management in Soviet industry were not necessarily sanctioned by the state, but in a capitalist economy these alliances were a real threat to the power and profits of the new elite. Filtzer has written of the robust system of

informal "shop floor relations" which had to be destroyed in the early 1990s. "The elite, in order to maintain its political control over society, required the atomization of the population and of the industrial workforce in particular." (Filtzer 1994, 6) This atomization ensured that no viable opposition would emerge. The atomization also meant that people lost their sense of knowing others at work.

Workers felt that the formal organization of work offered recourse. One woman explained:

> When we worked there was a supervisor, there were deputy commissioners, party commissioners, everything. If something wasn't going right for a person they would help, in some measure, something. Somehow they related better to a person, of course better than now."

And Lyudmila commented:

> Before at least there was the party discipline, there was at least someone to complain to, at least complain to whoever was in the party there, someone to complain to, even if he were a party chairman. […] But now who is there to complain to? There is no one. Try it! Where will you go to complain? To whom? There is no one to complain to! No one.

According to Clarke and Fairbrother:

> Conflicts of interest existed within the old system, but they were normally anticipated and resolved bureaucratically through the political-administrative apparatus, which applied a judicious mixture of concession and repression. The disintegration of this apparatus has opened up new conflicts, by giving free play to forces which had hitherto been contained. (1993, 91)

The Soviet order provided some, albeit limited, avenues of recourse for individuals.

Blat

Formal and informal workplace relations were important, but *blat* networks were the principal way people made things happen. According to Ledeneva's *Russia's*

Economy of Favours "*blat* is the use of personal networks and informal contacts to obtain goods and services in short supply" (Ledeneva 1998, 1). *Blat*'s origins are pre-revolutionary, when *blat* implied criminality. By the 1950s, *blat* enmeshed itself with the official Soviet system, primarily through industry. *Tolkachi* "'pushed' for the interests of their enterprise in such matters as the procurement of supplies. Their 'professional' role was to support the Soviet command economy, to enable it to work, which paradoxically could be done only by violation of its declared principles of allocation" (1998, 25).

During the 1960s the relationship between state industry and *blat* further evolved. *Blat* retained its intimate connections to the workplace, but was not located in the workplace. The *blatmeister* secured public resources for personal, not industrial, needs. It is this variation of *blat* which had its heyday under Brezhnev. Because of the dual nature of *blat*, "grounded in both personal relationships and in access to public resources" (3), occupational position organized *blat* networks, in that occupation "provided access to different kinds of resources—material resources as well as contacts, time and information—which could be involved in informal exchanges" (127). In this way *blat* connected people to each other primarily through their positions in the economy and bureaucracy of the Soviet state. "One's present and past jobs, those of friends, relatives, and others with whom one had blat, and all *those* people's social and kin relations gave one access to commodities and services" (Pesmen 2000, 135). Connections across occupations accessed the widest array of goods, services, and favors. *Blat* networks were also strengthened when they included members of different social strata, or vertical connections. These social relationships "tended to 'colonize' state institutions" (Argenbright 1999, 7) and personalize the bureaucracy (Ledeneva 1998, 85) functioning

as conduits of public goods and services. State structure organized the very social relations which often served to circumvent the state.

In Soviet times, women used *blat* networks to secure daily household needs connected to tasks such as shopping. Men's *blat* networks were used for "obtaining a job, acquiring construction materials, or obtaining official permission for a dacha" (Ledeneva 1998, 120), all tasks that required connections in industry or state bureaucracy. While this division of tasks was likely not hard or fast, as a general pattern it had implications for men's and women's experiences in the early 1990s. Ledeneva also notes that by virtue of their presence in commerce and service sectors of the economy, sectors less affected than manufacturing, women were more likely to have access to consumer goods and services (1998, 121).

Blat was the "proof of one's belonging" (Ledeneva 1988, 84) in society and "rested on individual repertoires built up over lifetimes" (Pesmen 2000, 135). There is some debate in the literature on whether *blat* practices are analogous to gift giving and whether they are different from friendship (Pesmen 2000, 128; Caldwell 2004, 82). A distinction between *blat* and friendship is artificial at best. These practices existed along a continuum and were always open to interpretation. Mauss defines the gift as spontaneous in theory but "in fact obligatory and interested" (Mauss 1967, 1). The degree of obligation and interested-ness varied widely. Nielsen recounts an outing with his musician friend Seryozha who asked his friend Volodya to help find some Armenian wine. A friend of Volodya's provided the alcohol. Nielsen asked Seryozha if he gave Volodya records. Seryozha said, "Well, once in a while I bring him an LP. But Volodya's a friend and a good guy. He won't object if he gets nothing in return" (2006, under "B.

The Weakness of Money"). Moreover, *blat* exchanges took place between individuals situated in networks. In the above example Volodya's friend did Volodya a favor; in turn Volodya did Seryozha a favor. Seryozha might not give Volodya anything, but it is also possible that Volodya might ask Seryozha to do a favor for another friend or even a friend of a friend. Thinking of an exchange between individuals is misleading. It makes more sense to think of Soviet *blat* practices within a collective or a network. A person might not get anything in return, or she might make something happen for someone else. Through "chains of 'help,' one might occasionally lose track of for what one owed whom and what one was owed. New friendships were born" (Pesmen 2000, 137). When I use the term *blat* I use it broadly to indicate network of social relations which made things happen. Otherwise I simply refer to social relations. These relations were seen as friendships, acquaintances, connections, and even corruption. To distinguish these categories is artificial and strained at best, especially when *blat* was a network with long chains of interaction which might include any of these. *Blat* was collective action.

Importantly, *blat* affected inequality in the Soviet system. "There was no equality in what one could get through personal channel, but there was an equality in that everyone enjoyed what his or her personal contacts provided" (Ledeneva 1998, 85). Equality was thus linked to sociability. "In so far as those who had no privileges in the state distribution system could by-pass rationing and queueing it had an equalizing as well as a stratifying effect. It therefore had a bearing on the society's egalitarian claims and its actual inequalities" (Ledeneva 1998, 36). Ledeneva does not go so far as to suggest that inequalities were tempered through *blat*—rather it could both equalize and stratify—but the logic of inequality under the Soviet system was complicated by *blat*.

Caldwell contends that *blat* is “geared at evening out inequalities of access” (Caldwell 2004, 82). The most extreme inequalities were based on privileges granted to the *nomenklatura*, or party appointees, but privileges were disseminated through *blat* networks at all levels of society. “Those who did not possess power or privileges to enable them to live according to formal rules were forced to elaborate a network of acquaintances, personal connections, mutual obligations to each other” (Ledeneva 1998, 162-163). In this sense *blat* was a form of power.

Giddens writes of the “two ‘faces’ of power”—“the capability of actors to enact decisions which they favour on the one hand and the ‘mobilization of bias’ that is built into institutions on the other” (Giddens 1984, 15). Giddens does not stop there, though. Power is exercised through the use of “resources”—both material and bodily. Those resources are “drawn upon and reproduced by knowledgeable agents in the course of interaction” (Giddens 1984, 15). This type of power is highly diffuse. For Giddens power is action. Hannah Arendt takes this one step further. “Power,” she writes, “corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together” (1970, 44). *Blat* was collective action and a form of power.

Blat and being needed

Individuals who were well positioned in *blat* networks and helped solve other people’s problems “formed a stratum called ‘useful people’ (*nuzhnye liudi*), who were in demand when something was needed” (Ledeneva 1998, 115). They were people who

entered into friendships easily and cultivated relationships which "consisted of regular access to each other's resources rather than just favour-for-favour exchanges" (115). "Useful people" is the same phrase that I have translated as needed people. Needed people were useful people in that they had something to offer. As one of Ledeneva's informants explained:

> It does not matter what you can offer, nobody wants anything extraordinary, it can be just advice or information ('Sugar will be available in that shop at 6 p.m., go and get it' or 'I am going to queue for sausages, do you want half a kilo?') It is important to be useful to the other, in other words, to care. (Ledeneva 1998, 148)

Not being needed occurs when individuals are excluded from social relations.

None of our informants explicitly referred to *blat*. This is not surprising given Ledeneva's discussion of the "misrecognition" (1998, 59) of *blat* whereby individuals involved did not refer to their own connections as *blat*. Instead of *blat*, interviewees, like Margarita, Galina, and others talk about not knowing people. They are referring to the collapse of Soviet state and of *blat* networks based in large part on position vis-à-vis the Soviet state. These networks were enmeshed with the Soviet state as much as they circumvented it, and so the collapse of the state was also, to a certain degree, a collapse of society. In the words of one interviewee, "Stability crumbled in all relationships." This explains why older Muscovites insist they can no longer fathom who people are when they do not understand what people do for work.

> The combination of policies of full employment, ideologies of collective ownership, and social construction of identity through productive work meant that a job conferred not only a wage but also mediated a set of social, economic and cultural relations between the individual and the wider community. (Pine and Bridger 1998, 8)

Social relations in Soviet Russia were how people made things happen. People could set things into motion. Needed people were especially capable in this realm. What might happen through these very broad networks was never entirely predictable. *Blat* was spontaneous and felicitous. It held the potential of surprise and adventure. *Blat* could produce the unexpected. And yet *blat* was intimately tied with order—the order of the state and people's positions in that order. That constraint, or order, gave *blat* its efficacy and power. People could get the goods and services they needed because social relations hinged on the state through, primarily, occupation. Order gave shape to improvisation and made it potent. State order gave individuals agency to, in Giddens' words, "make a difference" (1984, 14).

Work and being needed

Losing work in the early 1990s was the loss of social identity and participation. Informants spoke about this loss using the idiom of being unneeded. Below are excerpts from interviews with men, the first with an engineer and the second with an academic, which connect the loss of work to feelings of being unneeded by the state.

> Ira: And what happened in Russia during and after perestroika? How can you describe it? […]
> Stanislav: Uncertainty in life, no desire, many did not even have a desire to live.
> Ira: From those changes?
> Stanislav: A lot of institutes, factories, collapsed. People who had worked there all their lives and knew that they had work, and that this meant that they had the means to survive, were without work. I even had good electricians, who had received the Lenin prize. Afterwards they dug ditches somewhere in order to survive. Zelenograd is an electronics city. If they closed it, then people…without that they had nothing, and a lot, well, it is just that I had acquaintances who even finished their lives [committed

> suicide]. They couldn't handle it. This was simply not recorded and not counted.
> Ira: So they really suffered…
> Stanislav: Well, people sat in one place for 30 years and suddenly they kicked them. They said you aren't needed anywhere [*ne nuzhnyi nigde*]. […] He saw…Before he saw that he was needed [*nuzhen*] to the country, that he was in demand [*vostrebovan*], then suddenly people were simply not in demand [*vostrebovannye*] and nobody needed them [*ne nuzhny nikomu*].

And the academic:

> You need to consider that among Russians were so many specialists in the professional system—specialists who were oriented toward government offices, enterprises. They worked there for years and afterwards it was as if they were, as industry was destroyed, they ended up as if they weren't in demand [*nevostrebovannymi*] at all. Not in demand [*nevostrebovannymi*]. And what do you do in that situation? You had to break yourself—psychologically. […] That means, like soldiers, professional army men, who fought a lot and were indispensable [*neobkhodimy*], needed [*nuzhny*] and suddenly they return to a peaceful life. Some sort of posttraumatic syndrome actually.

It was not simply being without work which made people feel unneeded. What they had worked for—the socialist state—was now defunct, as was the place they occupied in that state. Middle-aged workers were particularly vulnerable given the fact that they were still working, but close to retirement. They did not have the time to remake themselves, nor were they already retired and shielded from restructuring. They were caught, sometimes forced into early retirements with meager pensions. This was at a time when their experience accorded them something to offer others, particularly younger generations. Consider the following three statements from different interviewees.

> It was also that moment when we could have, could have now helped. […] We had already built and done so much.

> What rich experience—it just seemed that we would still be needed [*nuzhny*].

> Before we knew everything, but now we don't know anything.

Suddenly, when they should have been the most needed for the state and for others around them, they were unneeded. Their knowledge and familiarity with the practice of Soviet work was of limited value as work was transformed into a new practice. Thus their capacity to socially act, “to act in concert,” (Arendt 1970, 44) was compromised.

Work served as both the site at which individuals were incorporated into Soviet state structure and an identity by which individuals related to each other socially. It is the primary nexus of state structure and collective agency explored in this dissertation. But if unemployment mediated between shock therapy and mortality it is important to turn to shock therapy itself, including the global political-economic context which facilitated it.

Chapter 8

Shock

How is it possible to reconstruct the soul and character of people?
—interviewee

In the late 1980s through 1990 there was a brief period of hope before everything fell apart during shock therapy, a strategy of economic reform based on structural adjustment programs which tied International Monetary Fund loans to conditions of deregulation, privatization, and cuts to social spending. These policies bore the mark of Milton Friedman's neoliberalism and were legitimated in the heyday of Reaganomics and Thatcherism. This chapter deals with the years of economic shock therapy. Ivan and Lidia introduce the themes of gender and inequality and their relationship to being unneeded.

Restructuring

Political scientists generally date Perestroika from March 1985, when Gorbachev was appointed General Secretary, to December 1991, when the USSR was dissolved and Gorbachev resigned. The vast majority of my informants did not think of perestroika in

this way, but in its simple senses of restructuring or reconstruction[24]. For many of them perestroika has no end date as yet. Gorbachev started the process and lost control of it, Yeltsin corrupted it, and Putin managed it.

When middle-aged Muscovites became aware of the process of reform they were hopeful. Economic progress had slowed and there were shortages of basic foodstuffs and household goods. They realized the economic system needed adjustment and they were open to change. Yet they held on to promises such as that made by the 1986 Congress of the Communist Party that each family would be provided with a separate apartment by the year 2000. They thought that reform meant that existing industries would start producing more products for the consumer. As one interviewee said:

> Yes, yes, yes, there was a moment, when, naturally we all really wanted that those stagnant times would turn into more rapid development [...] First there wasn't enough clothing; there wasn't enough food; there wasn't enough housing. Of course, we wanted everything to be better. We felt that there wasn't enough for everyone, that someone was holding us back, and whether you wanted to or not, we felt the influence of that stagnation on us.

In the political realm, Gorbachev faced increasing opposition. Yeltsin, as the first democratically elected president of the Russian Soviet Republic in June 1991, was riding a crest of popular support. In August 1991 Yeltsin stood atop a tank in front of the Russian parliament building, known as the White House, as the defender of democracy against an attempted coup. At a secret meeting in December 1991 the leaders of Russia, Byelorussia and the Ukraine met to dissolve the USSR, effectively forcing Gorbachev to resign.

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[24] Political scientist Archie Brown makes a distinction between these translations, suggesting that reconstruction is preferable, "for it can carry the connotation of building a new edifice on the same land as well as the alternative and more limited meaning of no more than a modest updating of the existing building" (Brown 2007, 18).

Under Yeltsin a number of draconian economic reforms were introduced as 'shock therapy' in January 1992. They are widely regarded as a social disaster: "inexcusable from a moral perspective" (Chubarov 2001, 200); "one of the greatest crimes committed against a democracy in modern history" (Klein 2007, 220). In a conversation about this time with Sveta's parents at their *dacha* I mentioned that the logic behind the reforms was a kind of economic shock therapy. Sveta's mother looked at me and simply said, "Nobody needs therapy like that." The thought that things would improve was suddenly replaced by the realization that they would not.

> We thought that we'll live better, we'll throw away everything bad and we'll improve everything […] and then it happened that our generation, especially those in their forties were simply sacrificed. People weren't prepared at all to completely flip in that way to democracy, well to capitalism, because that didn't smell like democracy.

They were not prepared for shock therapy.

Free market monetarism

The shock, or big bang, approach was patterned on structural adjustment programs in Latin America. The roots of this approach lie in Milton Friedman's free market monetarism. Friedman's brand of economics, widely influential at the time, held that markets operated most optimally when unencumbered by government intervention. His work at the University of Chicago spearheaded the Chicago School of Economics, garnered a Nobel Prize in Economics in 1976, and presented an alternative to Keynesian economics. Keynesian economics, which had dominated the global scene post World War II, advocated more government presence and regulation in the economy. With the 1970s economic slowdown, Friedman's doctrine of the free market and monetary policy

was ascendant, setting the stage for Reagonomics and Thatcherism in the 1980s. Klein claims, “Friedman promised ‘individual freedom,’ a project that elevated atomized citizens above any collective enterprise and liberated them to express their absolute free will through their consumer choices” (2007, 52).

Before the years of Reagonomics and Thatcherism, Friedman’s tenants of deregulation, privatization, and cuts to social spending were implemented in Latin America—in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. In 1975 Friedman himself visited Chile and coined the term “shock treatment” (Klein 2007, 81). The treatment came with side-effects: inflation, unemployment, curtailed social services, increased poverty, and new forms of inequality. Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs applied similar principles in neoliberal market reform in Bolivia before he moved to East Europe—first Poland and then Russia. Sachs’s approach was a bit more humane than that of the Chicago School. He believed economic reform should be accompanied by international aid and debt forgiveness.

A collision of logics

The dominant logic of Soviet socialism at the time this generation came of age, was a radiant future (*svetloe budushchee*) built over time through Soviet labor. History, in Soviet ideology, is progressive. A better life and a better society always lie ahead. It may have been necessary to sacrifice, but in no case did the ideology of a radiant future account for periods of regression. Regression was the fate of capitalist societies with their never ending cycle of boom and bust. For all of their formative years, middle-aged

Muscovites saw progress in their lives and in society. With war as the backdrop, progress was evident in postwar reconstruction, the construction of Moscow, and the technological and scientific revolution of the 1950s, including the accomplishments of the space program. In the 1960s, the expansion of housing served as further proof of progress.

The logic of economic shock therapy flew in the face of Soviet ideas of progress. In order for economic shock therapy to succeed, things had to get worse before they would get better. Moreover the fruits of Soviet labor—state industry in particular—had to be destroyed. Destruction, not construction, was central to success. Neoliberal economics held that "markets can spontaneously create a new world if the old can first be destroyed. Shock therapy's package of price liberalization, stabilization, and privatization aims to dissolve the past by the fastest means possible…It is neoliberalism's pious hope that destruction is the vehicle for genesis" (Burawoy and Verdery 1999, 5). According to Sachs (1995), the reason shock therapy did not succeed in Russia is because Russian technocrats were not thorough enough.

> Despite the [sic] all of the uproar in recent years about "shock therapy" in Russia, knowledgeable observers understand that it simply never occurred, an obvious point when one compares Russia's disorganized and partial stabilization efforts with the decisive actions in the Czech Republic, Estonia, or Poland. (Sachs 1995, 53)

The implication is that what happened in Russia was uniquely Russian and had nothing to do with the West. In other words, Russians did their own thing to their own peril.

In response to the logic of destruction, middle-aged Muscovites mourn what has been destroyed. At the same time, they contest the discontinuity that destruction projects onto their lives. In the chapter on work Viktor and Vera, in particular, were adamant that new Russians were benefitting from the sacrifice and labor of older generations. Vera tells Sveta, "You are still living on what our generation built." And Viktor proclaimed

that "All of present day democratic Russia…rests on what that [wartime] generation built." This couple refused to accept that their life work had been destroyed, even as they mourned the destruction of Soviet society and its social relations.

Shock therapy

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, young Russian and Harvard technocrats, headed by economists Yegor Gaidar and Sachs respectively, wasted no time in transforming Russia's centralized socialist economy. The plan began with price liberalization and the withdrawal of state subsidies. With the end of price controls, the government expected prices to treble. In fact they rose ten to twelvefold (Chubarov 2001). Inflation—in 1992 it rose to 1561 percent (Carlson 2000, 1364)—meant that the price of basic necessities jumped upward. People's assets, accumulated over a lifetime, lost practically all of their value within a few months. People lost their savings.[25] Among interviewees, lifelong savings of 5000, 10,000 and 12,000 rubles were lost.

In tandem with these developments, there was a severe industrial contraction whereby production was halved in a matter of years (Chubarov 2001). People consequently lost their jobs.

> Even though we worked at those factories, I didn't expect that it would flop. They suddenly failed. Yes, and I never even thought that industry would come to a stop.
>
> Everyone was really nervous and suffered. Work was up in the air.[…] And where would they take you if everything was closed?

[25] Savings were not unusual among Soviet citizens, given that there was not much on which to spend money.

> Whoever worked at factories, that was very…that was it. Everything was shuttered […] Everything fell apart into OOO [LLC, limited liability companies] and EEE or something—into those shreds.

Those who kept their jobs were often not paid or paid in kind. People remembered not being paid for six, seven, and eight months. Official and partial unemployment peaked at 14 percent (Chubarov 2001)—a level which does not account for those with jobs but no salaries. Although this does not seem extremely high, in a society where guaranteed employment was a basic tenant of social justice this was previously unimaginable. The "shock" of unemployment was not restricted to those who lost their jobs, but to everyone who came to understand that their work was no longer secure. "I think it all happened, in part, uncontrolled. If they had told people that your enterprise will go bust. You will be left without work. You will live on kopeks. They will even not pay anyone their salary for eight months. It was as if there was no money in the country. It was terrible." Younger workers moved from one sector of the economy to another hoping to find the elusive higher salaries of a free market. "Many left in all directions. […] But the older ones who were just under 50 […] where would they go? There was a saying: 'Thirty, maximum forty years old and that's it.'" Older workers did not have the time to retrain, change specialties, or wait for industry to recover.

Inflation, unemployment, and salary arrears meant that the majority of Russians struggled to make ends meet. "I began to fight for my subsistence," said one man. They stopped eating meat and lived, in some cases, entirely on bread, potatoes or macaroni. They sold odds and ends on the street for extra income. "There was nothing for people to live on. They began to sell, practically their silverware, all of that." It was not simply that prices were rising and income was not rising to the same degree for the majority of the population. No one knew if and when it would end.

> The hardest times were under Yeltsin when they didn't pay my pension for half a year. They didn't give my husband his salary. I was already retired […] If you eat some piece of meat you try to boil it and feed your husband—and myself some edge on a bit of bread. [...] Under Yeltsin tomorrow was on the whole a dead end.

Uncertainty, even fear, was augmented by an absence of state regulation and control. Crime rose precipitously and the Russian mafia appeared on the streets in to fill the authority vacuum, offering protection to fledgling businesses for a price. A prominent Moscow State University political scientist involved in polling at the time told me that the catchword was order (*poriadok*)—people simply desired a return to social order and stability. "Many began to look back to Brezhnev's days with nostalgia, realizing that stability in life had its own definite value and that, at times, 'stagnation' was more desirable than reforms and changes." (Chubarov 2001, 149)

Following price liberalization and withdrawal of state subsidies, public assets were privatized. Anatoly Chubais, under Gaidar, was in charge of privatization which began with "voucher privatization" or "the people's privatization." Every Russian citizen would receive a voucher worth 10,000 rubles—an appreciable sum at the end of 1991 equivalent to the value of a new car. According to the plan, in 1993 people would be able to cash in their vouchers or purchase shares in newly privatized enterprises. Unfortunately by 1993, after a year of rampant inflation, the vouchers were next to worthless. People sold them for about 40 rubles each wherever they found buyers. An early incarnation of the MMM financial pyramid scheme began to collect privatization vouchers in an investment scheme. "MMM invest turns your vouchers into gold!" promised the television advertisements (Hoffman 2003, 219).

> Then they began to create…front men…those pyramids. For 40 rubles people brought vouchers. You could turn them in there. One person sold them, another waited. Another sold them for a bottle. Everyone did

> whatever. And afterwards someone collected them and they privatized [state assets]. The result was they privatized all of our energy supply. In sum they fooled us, they lied to us. We never loved Chubais, we don't love him, and we won't love him.[26]

In Chubarov's assessment, "The result of Chubais' voucher privatization was that all Russians for a moment became candidates for property ownership, only to discover the next moment that most of them were effectively excluded from owning a slice of the former state assets" (2001, 205). Margarita still has her vouchers; by the time she wanted to redeem them she could not find any organization accepting them. Her experience was not unique. "They gave us vouchers which we could never turn in anywhere." Another interviewee simply said, "They shafted the people."

In another privatization program shares were distributed to employees of enterprises. Management often bought back workers' shares. One woman, who had a personal connection to the head accountant of a clothing conglomerate received a call from the accountant's assistant. "'Do you want to make a pretty penny?' I said, "Who doesn't want to?' 'Well, come,' she said, 'we'll go tomorrow morning.' So I was on the committee where we enumerated how many shares all of our workers, each one, had." When she sold the stock she had received and purchased, she received 3000 rubles per share while, according to her, all the other "girls" received 1500. She received 75,000 rubles and used a third of her windfall to buy a refrigerator and stove before putting away the rest for her burial. When she told this story to Ira 50,000 rubles were worth close to 2000 dollars. Ira, incredulous, asked her if she meant 50,000 in today's rubles. She did. She alluded to an agreement between managers.

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[26] This is a play on the well known phrase, "Lenin lived, Lenin is alive, Lenin will live!" which was on a 1965 Soviet propaganda poster with Lenin standing in front of the Soviet flag.

Stanislav, a foreman in the electronics industry, described how vouchers were taken from the workers by factory directors and party bosses "who had connections to buy that factory for kopeks […] Then bigger sharks bought then out or beat them out. Then it developed into whoever had the greatest possibilities [and] the most connections grabbed and sliced away." In 1995 all pretense of "the people's privatization" was dropped and remaining state assets were auctioned off under a program dubbed loans-for-shares.[27] Bankers and businessmen with connections to Yeltsin acquired the state's assets for a pittance. This group became Russia's oligarchy. "Without any profession, he's a millionaire, and for him you are…Who needs anyone anywhere? […] By means of what labor did they achieve it? Deceit! Speculation! And it is permitted—that is the question!" Compared to an increasingly wealthy oligarchy, ordinary workers were nothing. According to one interviewee privatization was a crime. Millionaires stole their riches from the people without any retribution. He remembered a time when such people would have been shot.

There is some debate as to how much economic and social inequality actually increased during the years of economic shock therapy, since inequality was officially nonexistent in Soviet times. According to World Bank data the Gini index[28] was 0.24 in 1988, and reached its zenith in 1993 at 0.48. In 2007 it is 0.44 (World Bank, Development Research Group).

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[27] Technically these were loans to the state from the oligarchy. Once the state paid back its 'creditors' the shares would be returned to the state. The state never repaid these 'loans.'

[28] The Gini index is a measure of inequality in society. It theoretically ranges from a value of 0 to 100, where 0 represents complete equality and 100 complete inequality. Country values range from 20s in Northern Europe to the 50s and 60s in Africa and Latin America. In 2000 it was .41 in the United States. (World Bank 2011)

In their own words

This generation of Muscovites described the early 1990s as a time of collapse, upheaval, disorder, decay, wildness. The period itself was characterized by chaos, madness, mutiny, thievery, the grabbing of power and profit. It was "the organized destruction of a country" or "the crime of wild capitalism against organized socialism." It was certainly a shock, but it was by no means therapy. In their evocative phrasing the fall of the Soviet Union and all that ensued was "a cultural revolution", "the opening of another world", "as if the world had burst open." It meant "the loss of the sense of life", "the loss of a future" and "the decay of the spirit." People experienced it as a radical upheaval of society. It was decidedly not reform. The word perestroika was a euphemism for something else—revolution, or worse. "As in one of our songs it is sung "To the foundation we destroy and then we'll take it and build a new world."

> And it was…it was so-called…in my opinion it was not perestroika. It was simply an apocalypse. It was simply all devastation. Perestroika is when we make a new house from our old *dacha*, right? When we know what we want. But then nobody knew what, who, what they wanted.

When I told Professor Vladislav my interest in that time he asked me when I had first come to Russia.

> Michelle: The first time was 1993.
> Professor Vladislav: And did you see?
> Michelle: Yes, I saw.
> Professor Vladislav: The year 93 was very…the process, you saw it, right?
> Michelle: Yes, I was in Peter.
> Professor Vladislav: The feeling of decline, true, yes, even superficially—the dark streets, the drawn faces, yes, people poorly dressed, poorly lit [*osveshchenny*]…

People's hopes that change would still bring a radiant future were well and truly extinguished by 1993.

As the Russian author of shock reform, Gaidar is widely reviled. Viktor said that the country had been betrayed. "Although it was necessary to change—to put a market economy into place. But with government regulation. Name me one government with a market economy where the government relinquishes everything." He referred to an interview in which Gaidar maintained that his program of price liberalization saved Russia from famine, civil war, and extinction. He called that a lie. He thought Gaidar would do better to ask forgiveness of the Russian people. One man said he could not stand to see Gaidar. When he found out that Gaidar had been poisoned, but lived, at the end of 2006, he thought, "'Why didn't they poison him to the death?' No, but […] he grabbed money from the whole country, from each person. He did that and that's why he will still answer for that on the Day of Judgment." That day may have already come; Gaidar died in December of 2009 at only 54 years of age of complications of cardiovascular disease.

The metaphors used to describe this time are instructive. The country "ran free" and people were "fish in muddy waters," unable to see and easily duped by the government, banks, and schemes.

> No leader appeared. No idea appeared. It was as if they sicced a sitting dog. They sicced a dog and all hell broke loose, I think of it like that. And then the country ran loose. And on the sly whoever got their bearings, they started to catch fish in muddy waters.

The social norms became opaque. "Horrible, and people still didn't understand anything. They rushed from one extreme to another. One person made a killing, another didn't. Everyone went their own way." Some were caught in the "muddy waters"; some did the catching. Ivan's and Lidia's accounts of this time highlight particular experiences of this

generation in the early 1990s as their lives, along with the state and economy, were transformed.

Ivan

I first met Ivan, an English teacher, at a meeting of the English club I attended in Moscow. He is a tall, lean man with a slight stoop. His dark hair is thinning in the back. He was polite and soft spoken, but also excitable. On certain topics he became agitated and even angry. Besides teaching English at secondary school and two institutes of higher education, he gives private English lessons to children from well-to-do families. He is married to a former student, twenty years his junior, and they have two young daughters. The second one was born during my time in Moscow.

He was apologetic when he first invited me to his home as they have two narrow adjoining rooms in a barrack, or a dormitory originally constructed for workers. When we stepped off the bus he pointed to where a bomb had blown up apartment buildings across the street in September 1999, one of a spate of apartment bombings that month. The staircase of Ivan's building is wide and would be quite grand were it not in such a state of neglect. There is litter strewn about; drywall and plaster is scattered on the cement floor; graffiti covers the walls. The faint smell of liquor and urine permeates the dark entryway. As is common in five story buildings in Moscow, there is no elevator. There is a communal bathroom—where I once saw water running on an enormous pile of unattended laundry —and a communal kitchen on each floor of the building where occupants have an electric burner or two. This is where Ivan's wife, Olya, sometimes

cooks with her baby in a sling and her toddler on the floor nearby, although she prefers to use the electric steamer for cooking in one of their rooms. The first time I visited their home Ivan exchanged words with his neighbor in the broad hallway over electricity charges in 2004 that either had or had not been paid by the neighbor. The cashier at the utility company told Ivan that the debt had not been paid. His neighbor, however, had already collected Ivan's share of 575 rubles and shown him a receipt of payment. As we stepped inside the small private entryway connecting two narrow rooms, Ivan told me his neighbors were uncultured and he preferred not to interact with them, but they would now need to arrange a time to visit the utility company together.[29]

Before I conducted an interview with Ivan, I hadn't realized that he had ever been anything but an English teacher. Pointing to a collection of Lenin's works on a shelf above the door, he told me that he taught secondary school history until 1991 when he was 38 years old.

> Ivan: But when perestroika began, I observed a lot of incorrect things, a lot of false things and I refused to teach history. I was left without bread.
> Michelle.: You refused?
> Ivan: Yes, I refused.
> Michelle.: And why?
> Ivan: Because of the many incorrect things, the many lies.
> Michelle.: For example?
> Ivan: About the history of our country, and about the history of other countries. About world history. About capitalism and socialism. We already know how socialism ended. But we believed in it—really believed—and now it turns out that we were deceived and I refused to do history because it is lies. Each time history is rewritten under new leaders.

Later he explained:

> I lectured, I taught, and what, it turns out, came out is that I taught lies. That which was written in books, that which they taught us at [the institute], that is what I taught.

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[29] Conflicts over the division and payment of electric bills are legion in Russia. They are a familiar subject of satirical short stories and films on communal living.

Ivan felt he couldn't relearn a new history if and when it came.

> And I couldn't anymore, simply reeducate myself again. Wait until everything is organized and truth is apparent. And I understood that truth would never come to light now. It will not be. Nobody knows that truth—how, what, which was. For that I need one more life to live out, and there is no more time. I was already of an age.

The head teacher at the school suggested Ivan teach English language instead. The next day he taught his first lesson. At first he was only one lesson ahead of his students, but he was motivated by the need to earn a living. In fact he was so motivated that he returned to university and received another degree in the department of foreign languages and then stayed on to teach there too.

Before the fall of the Soviet state, Ivan had a savings of 10,000 rubles, which likely represented seven to nine years base salary. He was waiting to be assigned an apartment. In a matter of a few months Ivan's life savings was worth almost nothing. He bought a cheap jacket for 200 rubles at the market, which still hangs in the closet. When I asked him to describe the early 1990s in two words Ivan said, ruefully, "the fall of the spirit." The phrase is sometimes translated as despondency in English. "The fall of the spirit…and an absolute uncertainty about the future. There is no future." I wondered if perhaps now, fifteen years hence, he saw a future for Russia. He raised his voice. "Russia has no future. Russia has no future."

Ivan is affronted by new economic inequality:

> It is perfectly understood that a normal person working a full workday even, even 16 hours like I do […], doing any honest work cannot earn billions, millions. It is possible to earn…Well how much? I don't know. Well let it be even five thousand [dollars] per month—more than enough for our country. I would agree that they could earn five thousand. But millions per month is not possible in any normal, honest way. You can only steal that, like they did. They stole enterprises, they privatized. They took away our checks. I gave away a check and millions of people gave vouchers to savings banks. We thought they were specially organized, that

> we would receive profit. But they stole everything for themselves and consequently got those enterprises, plants, factories from the government.

He began to speak about Potanin, an oligarch who acquired his wealth by first proposing and then profiting from the loan-for-shares program.

> He has a huge nickel production plant. That plant is worth, I don't know, billions. From where does a person, one person, have enough money to buy that? Even if it were a low price [...] It isn't possible for a normal, simple person to get that somewhere and buy that. That is only attainable through theft. And that is how they […] stole for themselves and calmly sit around pontificating about laws, about democracy.

Ivan told me that he did not mind if there were wealthy people as long as others could live "worthily, normally." He thought it was absurd that some people living in poverty could not afford food and others were "swimming in fat." "They do not know what to do with their money. They buy sports teams, yachts, the pyramids in Egypt."

These days Ivan teaches and tutors students. In the summertime Olya and the girls stay at the *dacha* 250 kilometers from Moscow where Ivan is building a modest country home. Ivan says he no longer has time to suffer. He only has time to survive, raise his children, and construct the *dacha.*

> A lot of people lost their spirit, lost their faith. They took to drink. They were unemployed, without food. There was nothing to live on. They were thrown out. Millions of people were thrown out on the street, from their work. They closed companies, factories…What were people supposed to live on? Unknowingly they took to drink.

He told me, "I survived all of these hard years, fifteen years. I haven't taken to drink."

The fall of the Soviet Union represents a real rupture in Ivan's life, and he was perhaps the most embittered person interviewed. Older respondents, while unhappy with their lot, were resigned to it in as far as they were now too old to do much about it. Ivan responded to the changes. He works long hours, and is unable to provide as he would like for his family. Ivan told me that teaching was an acceptable career for a woman but not

for a man. He thought most of his female colleagues were living on their businessmen husbands' earnings. Living in a barrack without much extra income has wrecked some havoc on Ivan's marriage. More than once Ivan and Olya have separated. Olya feels Ivan is failing her as a husband. She wants a better life for herself and her children. For his part, Ivan doesn't feel Olya fulfills her duties at home as a wife, cooking and cleaning. At one point Ivan's father-in-law told him that perhaps Olya would do more housework if she lived in a decent apartment—a prospect that is increasingly unlikely given the rising values of Moscow real estate.

Lidia

Lidia's experience was more harrowing than Ivan's but she describes it differently. Lidia lives on the same plot of land where she was born, in a house that her parents had built in the 1960s about 30 kilometers to the northwest of Moscow, within the Moscow *Oblast'* which surrounds the city. An electric train line runs behind the back fence of Lidia's yard, and stops at a station about a kilometer away. A dirt road leads the way back to the house.

The dark green wooden house is in the Russian country style with decoratively carved white window frames and white lace curtains. The yard is overrun with weeds except for a vegetable garden during the summer. The yard fills with mud in rain or during the spring thaw, and visitors walk over wooden planks until they reach the front steps which lead up to a mud room, full of shoes, boots, overcoats, and assorted Russian house slippers (*tufli*) available for visitors. Beyond the entryway, there is a small kitchen,

sitting room, and two bedrooms off of the sitting room. During the year I visited new wallpaper with bright green vertical vines had been hung in the sitting room and a new dresser installed in the corner as part of preparations for her son's marriage. A few years prior, pipes were installed for running water in the kitchen. There is an outhouse in the back.

Lidia is not in good health. In her twenties, she spent half a year hospitalized and is officially disabled.[30] She worked at home for twelve years, often until two in the morning while her children were sleeping, knitting and sewing for a local factory that employed the disabled. She has been married twice to men who drank. Her second husband died of alcohol poisoning in 1990 when their second child was only three years old. Soon after that, the factory for the disabled was closed. When food coupons were issued for basics such as bread, meat, butter and eggs Lidia would leave her nine year old son in a line for bread which extended across the market square while she took her five year old daughter shopping for other groceries. They went without meat. And yet Lidia says, "Well, generally that perestroika time, because I am a homebody, it didn't touch me very much. Because I'm like in my own little world, in my circle. [It was] like I were defended, in this shell, my house, my fortress." She thought that all women were protected to some extent. "If a woman has a family then, of course, it was easier for a woman. If she was without a family and a business woman, like they say now, then of course it was also hard because industry, everything completely changed."

She was philosophical about the changes.

> Well, it is like it always is in Russia. We destroy the old world […] And of course there are those who take advantage of the destruction. As always,

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[30] Disability is a recognized civil status which confers government benefits depending on the degree of disability.

> when some try to do something and others try to pocket it all, to pilfer as much as possible. It is like that. Well, simply a collapse occurred and that's it, nothing else, I think, a collapse, everything disordered. If before there was some sort of radiant future to hold on to, some sort of faith, although it may not be in God. But something, in something, if only in a radiant future. As if we waited for something, especially in the year 2000 when they promised to give each a separate apartment. […] Yes, generally we all, yes, aspired to a better future, created that better future. And then we stopped aspiring to anything, the old values disappeared. Like in the beginning we had no God. Now that socialism, radiant future didn't happen and nothing else has appeared on the horizon. And it has simply been a full collapse.

While society has changed around her she herself has remained the same, struggling to make ends meet and care for her children. She prefers "everything *sovkovoe*[31]", or Soviet-style. "I have not yet restructured myself. And my kids also grew up without perestroika, still with that *sovkovym* mentality also. And that is why now it is very hard for them to integrate." She and her family still live in the Soviet style, not far from the first Russian IKEA and an associated MEGA mall.

Gender and being needed

Ivan and Lidia both told me about difficult times in the early 1990s. Ivan lost savings, an expected apartment, and his field of expertise. Lidia lost her second husband and then her work. Yet they had very different reactions. Ivan is bitter about his losses and feels he cannot adequately provide for Olya and the girls despite his best efforts in the new economy. Lidia feels she was protected at home and has remained the same. She

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[31] *Sovokoye* denotes the quality of being Soviet. A person might be *sovok*, often used derogatorily in reference to someone who still behaves in a Soviet fashion. I once complained to a friend about the surly cashier at the store nearest my apartment building. "You could call her *sovok*," my friend said.

does not need to confront the changes. It is the case that Lidia receives some meager state support due to her disabled status, but this support does not ease the poverty of her family While these are but two individuals, their stories illustrate something about gender and being unneeded in the Russian context.

In Soviet times needed people were engaged in socially-useful work and social practices arranging for the allocation of favors and goods. Thus they had something to offer the state and others around them. In the early 1990s this feeling may have been particularly compromised for men, who found themselves peripheral to state, industry, and family. Women, at least, were still needed to hold their families together. In a sense, Ivan is still needed, in that he is the sole breadwinner in his family. But it is also true that he feels he cannot offer his family what he should be able to.

In Russia, women are regarded as more flexible, pragmatic, and longsuffering. Interviewees told me that Russian women were better equipped to confront hardship and social change. Russian women, they said, are resilient and hardy. Under the Soviet system, women's double or triple burdens (LaFont 2001; Verdery 1996) meant that they worked outside the home and were also responsible for housework, children, and husbands. They were used to daily struggle to feed and clothe their families. Many interviewees felt that women's central role in the family preserved them in the early 1990s. Interviewees disagreed whether this made the early 1990s harder for men or women. One woman claimed that it was harder for men in the early 1990s because it had always been easier for them. "It seems to me it was harder for men than women. Why? Because the harder yoke has always fallen to women." Women were used to hardship. According to another woman, a man might drink and forget everything else, even his

responsibility as breadwinner. Women's cares were less easily forgotten. In this sense the early 1990s were harder for women, because the "she is the master at home." "A man hopes his wife will figure it out," said another interviewee. Vera, who described herself and her husband as children of the war told Sveta: "The family hearth—everything depends on the woman, Sveta, and don't believe anyone [else]. Everything, the happiness of the family, peace, quiet—that depends on the woman. However bad a man is, a woman can make anything out of him." Women were expected to fight for the family. "You always need to fight, always need to fight, more so for your loved ones." If men had been the fighters during the Great Patriotic War, women were the fighters in the early 1990s.

The responsibility for children was central to the explanations of why women did better in terms of mortality in the early 1990s. As one woman said, "A woman always, even if she lost her husband, she is still with her children and she doesn't give up. She doesn't give up. But a man quickly somehow loses interest in life." Interviewees thought that family responsibilities gave women's life purpose and direction. Indeed a woman is able to find herself. "So a woman tries to be needed in whatever situation. To find herself somewhere where she is really needed. A woman keeps herself in hand. More so women who have children." A woman must be focused and responsible when others need her. One academic told me that women give and preserve life, and that is why they live longer than men. Rephrasing a verse from the Bible he explained, "Whoever saves the life of another shall live long." Especially in the chaos of the early 1990s, women were needed more than ever. They had to be pragmatic.

Men, on the other hand, might lose themselves in times of distress. "With men it is more complicated of course. It is hard for a man to find himself." Under the new

economic regime men were peripheral to the state, industry, and daily family life; they were more likely to go adrift when they were not able to fulfill their role as breadwinner.

> They closed factories, right, and something like that and men…as changes [occurred] in the family life a man lay on the sofa and began to drink. That's it. He lost his bearings and lost himself, and what was a woman to do? She conquered and began to hustle.

Even if men retained their work and their salaries, their paychecks were no longer worth what they had been, in monetary or moral terms. Their status as breadwinner was diminished, especially in an environment where, by the mid 1990s, a small class of citizens were emerging as the new rich.

While this talk portrays gender difference as natural, the point here is that women were still needed in the early 1990s because they had something to offer others. They could still make things happen for themselves and others. The collapse of the state and its industry meant a breakdown of *blat* networks (Ledeneva 1998, 198-199). It is probable, though, that the collapse of the state and its industry compromised men's *blat* networks more so than women's, in light of women's use of *blat* to fulfill daily needs and men's use of *blat* to secure favors from the state bureaucracy. Women's access to consumer goods and services would have been particularly important during shock therapy. Women still made things happen for themselves and others.

Men were simply unable to financially support their families as before, but women worked even harder to hold their families together. In this way, women's lives still made sense under the logic of sacrifice. Women were still enlisted in an effort larger than their individual lives. Men, already sidelined in the family, were now hardly needed as breadwinners. In her ethnography of homelessness in St. Petersburg in the late 1990s, Höjdestrand found that "many homeless men seemed to think that the incapacity to

perform the conventional breadwinning functions justified a total abandonment of family life as such, even in cases involving motherless children" (2009, 127). Women's responsibility of caring for others may have preserved them even as it burdened them. Men found themselves isolated. With no ties to ground them, they spun out of control.

Inequality

Another theme explicitly emphasized in Ivan's account is increasing social inequality. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this generation struggled to make sense of new wealth and blatant socioeconomic inequalities. Vast private fortunes were amassed during the years of shock therapy. To a generation raised with the ethic of socially-useful work this seemed criminal and immoral. In 1992, Russians began to refer to the "nouveaux riches," but this early inequality was mild compared to the class of elite businessmen, bankers, and oligarchs that seemed to emerge out of nowhere in 1994 and 1995.

Older Muscovites struggled to make ends meet during the early 1990s. Their struggle took place in a city of ostentatious inequality. The inequality may have been just as important as the struggle itself. Although social inequality had existed in Soviet society, the logic of inequality had changed from access to the means of production to the accumulation of wealth for conspicuous consumption. This new logic asserted itself most forcefully in the urban space of Moscow where power has long been concentrated. New wealth was flaunted, maligning

Soviet ideals, especially for the generations which had been most invested in realizing those ideals. Referring to Brezhnev's time, one man said:

> At least then during the stagnation we all lived roughly alike. Of course the managing workers, especially in the communist branch, all the party organizers and so on and higher…But then we didn't have….Not large-scale, not large-scale. All the rest were roughly living the same. When someone had a good profession, he received more. But now the people have just lost their conscience.

Professor Vladislav spoke of the sense of estrangement or alienation that arose between people with the advent of the "cult of money."

Wilkinson's work on inequality (1996; 1994) proposes that relative deprivation is more important than absolute deprivation in predicting life expectancy in industrialized countries. In other words, when most people already have access to a minimum level of material goods and services, then social factors having to do with perceived inequality come to the fore. In come inequality explains health disparities between developed countries as well as between individuals in those countries. This position, while not without its detractors (Deaton 2003), has gained prominence in explaining the complex relationship between wealth and health.

Income inequality is but one form of inequality which affects health. Socioeconomic status includes income but is also a way of accounting for class and status.. The World Health Organization's Commission on Social Determinants of Health, chaired by Michael Marmot[32], reports:

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[32] Marmot headed the Whitehall studies in the United Kingdom, which demonstrated graduated differences in mortality among civil servants according to employment grade. The effect, at least according to some accounts, is due to gradations in control and demand. Work which entails a low level of control and a high level of demands is detrimental to health. Perceived control over life is now used as an explanatory variable in many studies of health and socioeconomic status.

> Poverty is not only lack of income. The implication, both of the social gradient in health and the poor health of the poorest of the poor, is that health inequity is caused by the unequal distribution of income, goods, and services and of the consequent chance of leading a flourishing life. (CSDH 2008, 31)

The final report of the commission identifies material circumstances, social cohesion, psychosocial factors, behaviors, and biological factors as mediators between socioeconomic status and health (CSDH 2008). In epidemiology, the social cohesion and psychosocial factors that have been proposed to account for the relationship between socioeconomic status and mortality are myriad and go by many different names. Among psychosocial factors are: life events, job strain, job insecurity, perceived control, locus of control, coping style, social support, and social exclusion. Social cohesion includes social capital or civil society (Solar and Irwin 2007). Many of these variables have been used in studies on mortality in Russia. However, in an interim report of the WHO commission, Solar and Irwin identify the key weakness in this literature:

> One point noted by some analysts, and which we also wish to emphasize, is the relative inattention to issues of political context in a substantial portion of the literature on health determinants. It has become commonplace among population health researchers to acknowledge that the health of individuals and populations is strongly influenced by SDH [social determinants of health]. It is much less common to aver that the quality of SDH is in turn shaped by the policies that guide how societies (re)distribute material resources among their members. (Solar and Irwin 2007, 21)

In other words, the variables above become attributes of community rather than political economy. But Solar and Iwrin's point is also lacking, because, if it ever were the case, it is certainly no longer the case that societies develop their policies alone. In an era of globalization, state policies are situated in a wider, global political-economic context. Shock therapy in Russia is an especially good example of political and economic policies that were a result of global forces.

Shock therapy and mortality

No account of excess deaths in Russia would be complete without the historical backdrop of the rise of neoliberal capitalism on the global stage from the 1970s onward. The collapse of the Soviet Union only served to further the arguments for a free market economy with less government regulation. By the early 1990s shock therapy was considered a proven strategy of economic reform. It would have been an easy sell for Sachs, who worked as an advisor to Yeltsin in 1991 and had already implemented reform programs in Latin America and Eastern Europe. Shock therapy reforms resulted in the loss of jobs and the loss of savings in a context of hyperinflation.

This meant a form of shock poverty for much of the Russian population. That poverty was so suddenly thrust upon Muscovites surely augmented its debilitating force on the human body. According to the informants of this study, the new form of social inequality undercut Soviet social identity with its roots in the war and Soviet ideals of social participation through work. There is a holistic story which ties together global, Soviet and Russian political economy and Soviet and Russian social relations; ideas about sacrifice and collectivity; socially-useful work and *blat*; gender and inequality. The position of not having anything to give, “being unneeded” is fundamental to all of these. In the early 1990s Russia the country itself had nothing to offer other countries; in fact it was desperately in need of foreign aid. The destruction of the state and its economy compromised social relations which were enmeshed with the state. People’s ability to act

and, importantly, act collectively was curtailed. Global political economy has the most intimate fateful and fatal repercussions.

Being unneeded is fundamental to any understanding of the Russian mortality crisis and excess cardiovascular and alcohol-related deaths. It is one thing to describe social turmoil, and another to delineate how this results in disease and death of individuals. Clearly an epidemiology that restricts risk factors to the attributes of individuals or their communities is necessary but insufficient to tell the story of Russian mortality. In the next chapter I will turn to a discussion of what one interviewee called the “death of society.” In Russia it was the death of society which produced individual deaths.

Chapter 9

Death of Society

> We all perfectly understand where the death of society leads. The death of society is at first spiritual [*dukhovnaia*], then physical [*fizicheskaia*].
>
> Each [went] his own way, someone to robbery [*razboi*], someone else to a drinking spree [*zapoi*].
>
> —interviewees

Middle-aged Muscovites do not talk about "psychosocial determinants" of mortality. They talk about the soul, *dusha*. As in the epilogue, death is first spiritual.

Vasilii, a former alcoholic and member of the sobriety society *Sober Russia*, attended the 2007 Moscow alcohol policy seminar. After the seminar I arranged to meet him at the salon where he gives massages. A polite, soft-spoken man, Vasilli also told me that the sickness of the soul leads to sickness of the body.

> The soul suffers. A person has a soul, spirit. And there is the body. So, in the beginning the soul is hurt, and through the hurt of the soul the body is hurt. At first a person's soul is sick, and then the body begins to get sick. And then he dies and that's it. And why? Because first the soul…the soul sickened. The soul was harmed and only afterwards the body.

He explained the soul as emanating outward from the body, an "energetic envelope." As he spoke he reached out toward me, "I can reach out to you, not touching you. But you sense that I am somewhere close." He explained how breaking holy law compromises the energetic field. He gave examples of fighting, stealing, and hooliganism.

> When you break a law…you break holy law...If [you do] then your energetic envelope breaks. You continue further, now the body. If you are already sick there…[He waved his hand near the side of my body without touching me]…There is sick. [He touched the side of my body.] *Here* is sick.

Vasilii's soul does not reside in the inner recess of the body. The soul is located around the body. People sense others through the soul, the energy that emanates around the body. This is not the inner, individualized soul, but a soul that is constituted beyond the individual, between individuals. The soul is what exists between people in society, allowing people to sense and know others. The Russian soul is part of the individual, but also part of society. This view is also represented in other anthropological literature. Pesmen, who takes the Russian soul as the central object, notes that an informant told her the soul "isn't in individuals but in their union" (Pesmen 1995, 71).

Breaking societal norms of interaction ruptures the soul which is located between people. A ruptured soul cannot protect the body from sickness. "The death of society is at first spiritual," because it harms the bit of soul which connects individuals and thereby protects the body. When the soul is ruptured, death moves easily from soul into body. The soul protects the body as an envelope around the body. An envelope suggests enclosure, but energy suggests flexibility.

This understanding of a part of the soul lying between people recognizes that society, along with the constraints it imposes, protects the body. Vasilii spoke of transgressions which violate societal constraint and make the body vulnerable. Lidia, who lost her second husband to alcohol poisoning in 1990 and her job in the factory shortly thereafter, used the spiritual idiom to speak of another social constraint—the constraint that comes from belief in society.

> A person should always have belief in something, because only belief makes a person strong. And if during the Great Patriotic War only belief made a person strong, belief in meeting one's loved ones. So, in the times, so to say, before the Great October Revolution, belief was the foundation. There are those ideas like Old Believers, right? It is the fortress of the soul, spirituality. Belief, that is. They were united around this belief. Throughout time it was the foundation of a person's life. So here, when there was no more socialist government and no belief in stability […] everyone ran about [*kidalis'*]. And throughout time man searches for somewhere to run [*kinut'sia*].

While *kidat'sia* (in the form *kidalis'* above)has the sense of running amok, *kinut'sia* implies movement in a purposeful direction. Belief in a future—after the war, in the afterlife, in socialism—"makes a person strong" and gives a person "somewhere to run." Belief may imply ideology or it may simply imply an expected future. Belief, said Lidia, is the "fortress of the soul." If the soul is what connects and protects individuals, belief is what protects those connections. Belief unites people. Without belief individuals run amok. With belief, they run together. Belief provides a framework or structure to organize collective action. Both these forms of constraint, social interaction and social framework—soul and belief—are embedded in political economy. There is a proposed causality here. First belief crumbles, then the soul is harmed, and finally, the body sickens. Belief protects the soul which protects the body. Society needs stable structures (belief) to maintain social solidarity (soul) and health (body).

A cardiovascular death

On a cloudy February day I boarded a crowded bus at a metro stop with directions and address in hand. A woman whom I had previously interviewed had asked a friend, Natasha, if she would also speak with me. Natasha was at home with her five year old

granddaughter, who watched cartoons in the main room while we talked. Natasha, like Lidia and Margarita in earlier chapters, assured me that nothing much had changed for her. "You know, for me somehow, it didn't touch me at all. I have my problems, I had my affairs. Somehow the politics…I, I don't give a damn about the politics." I tried to clarify that I was interested in her daily life, not politics. "No, no. It was the same as how it had been for me. […] It didn't touch me." She told me that in the early 1990s she received her salary—"my *kopeiki*"—as before. There were no salary arrears at the hospital where she worked in housekeeping. The head doctor distributed food packages on Fridays. Since she had three children she received fifteen kilograms of milk a week, which she gave away or used to make chocolate truffles.

Natasha also told me that people live and die alone now. She spoke of a friend who died of a heart attack at 70 years old in the hospital where they both worked. "Right at work she had a heart attack and that's it. That's it. Forgotten." And then she added: "Who needs us? Who is needed now? Now no one needs anyone else. The world has become terrible." After talking about how children no longer help parents, she thought, "I also don't help anyone. I only help my granddaughter." Once again being needed is about giving, helping, offering something to others. Being needed is commentary on the hurt of the soul between bodies, because it is the demise of a fundamental social practice which connects individuals.

Natasha was one of the few interviewees to mention a heart attack or stroke. This is also an omission in the epidemiology of the mortality crisis. The epidemiology of cardiovascular mortality in Russia that does exist has turned from behaviors—diet, smoking, exercise—to psychosocial determinants, chief among them social capital.

Social capital-ism

In the western literature the concept of social capital is as much influenced by neoliberal capitalist understandings of social relations as the concept of being needed is influenced by Russian and Soviet ones. The former is not a novel observation. Fine (2001) and Navarro (2004), in particular, have stressed the intellectual history of social capital as intimately bound to the history of economics. The term social capital originated at about the same time as economists in the Western world turned from Keynes to Friedman. The logic of the free market is the accumulation of capital, broadly defined as resources used for production be they natural, physical, financial, or human. Cash is capital; assets are capital; even labor may be capital. In this sense social capital "properly refers to productive value that can be extracted from social networks and organizations" (Doug Massey in Muntaner 2004, 675). Social capital is more about what individuals receive than what they give.

In the epidemiology of the Russian mortality crisis civil society is an outgrowth of social capital. Post-Soviet scholars have considered the concept of civil society extensively, contesting the assumption there was no civil society in Soviet times and throwing doubt on the usefulness of the term (Hann and Dunn 1996; Hann 1998). Buchowski, among others, troubles the assumption that civil society is necessarily separate from state. Civil society is both used to govern and to "exert pressure on the power of state" (1996, 82). It "cannot be defined in terms of the opposition of society to the state, but should be seen as a dialectic of these two elements" (Buchowski 1996, 82).

In Soviet times, social relations were organized through Soviet structures, namely occupation, and served economic purposes, such as the distribution of goods and services. In addition, social relations infiltrated the political realm, secured political favors, and "softened the rigid constraints […] of the Soviet political system" (Ledeneva 1998, 182).

In contrast to "anticitizens" of an "hour-glass" society (Rose 2000; Rose 1999; Rose 1995), Soviet citizens had been preoccupied with establishing links to the state. These links provided a sense of empowerment and control. Russians used their links with the state to make things happen for themselves, certainly, but, even more importantly, for others. It is no wonder that individuals who rely on formal institutions or only on informal connects report poorer health in Russia. Historically, informal connections included those within formal institutions. The combination of formal and informal served to make the state and its bureaucracy responsive. Individuals with only one source of help—formal assistance or informal connections—have lost the critical combination of formal and informal. Without this, their sense of empowerment and control is weakened. Without a personal connection, there is no guarantee that formal institutions will respond to individual needs. Without a connection to formal institutions, what personal connections accomplish is limited.

Fukuyama writes that "if the state gets into the business of organizing everything, people will become dependent on it and lose their spontaneous ability to work with one another" (Fukuyama 2001, 18). Rather people might use state organization to enhance spontaneous collaboration. In Russia it was the collapse of the state and the restructuring of the economy which resulted in the loss of the spontaneous ability to work with one

another. Russians lost those "features of social life" that enabled them "to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam 1996, 664). They lost social capital, but a Russian social capital perhaps better referred to as neededness.

For useful or needed people in Soviet Russia, "controlling events" had come not through acquiring goods and services, but through distributing goods and services. Being needed is more about what people give than what they receive. Katherine Verdery writes of "allocative power" as socialism's most basic "law of motion;" power is located in redistribution instead of accumulation (1991, 420-421). While Verdery is writing of bureaucracy, the logic played out in individual social relations also. Speaking of a *blatmeister*, an informant of Ledeneva, who has written about Soviet *blat*, explained, "He realized that socialist society is a huge distribution system, and one just needed to find as many wires of this system as possible and stay near the socket" (1998, 172). Needed people were able to redistribute resources precisely because they were entangled within societal webs of power. As Ledeneva points out, Soviet *blat* networks were "interwoven with other forms of power—both economic and political" (1998, 2); they were "rooted in institutions of power" (68). To middle-aged Muscovites, being unneeded in the early 1990s was social disempowerment. Now, instead of a currency of social relationships which made everyday life possible, the new currency is cash.

Social capital reflects Western ideals and the political economy of neoliberal capitalism. Being needed reflects Russian ideals and the political economy of Soviet socialism. The mortality crisis in the early 1990s is a result of the collision of two cultural logics that left a certain generation of Muscovites disempowered and unneeded in the new Russia.

Drink and being needed

When Natasha's three children were young, and she was not working in the hospital, her husband drank. "He crawled, like a cockroach on all fours," she told me, as a description of his low state. She would take her children with her to meet him as he left work and collect his salary, but he would sometimes leave through another exit, disappearing for three or four days at a time. They have since separated, although they are still married. He has since stopped drinking and they now share responsibility for caring for their granddaughter during the week. Natasha has her granddaughter until five in the afternoon. When he comes home from work as a lathe operator, her husband looks after his granddaughter until ten at night. When I asked if it were hard for her husband to stop drinking, she spoke about his various past treatments. She also spoke of his relationship with his granddaughter:

> He can now drink a bottle of beer or something else, but he has a granddaughter, he helps out really well, he buys what…he buys her everything. He loves her. He teaches her everything. They even do drawing and everything.

Her husband doesn't need to drink now because he is needed, as a grandfather.

In another interview where drinking was implicitly connected to being needed, Yuri Ivanovich told me about his younger brother in Murmansk who had worked in a glass making factory which supplied parts for airplanes and submarines. He spoke of the exactness of the technology used and the strength of the glass produced. "Those were respected people, including my brother, and suddenly he found himself without work.

There weren't orders. There wasn't anything." When he paused I asked him about how his brother experienced the changes.

> Very hard. He was the typical representative of the working men in this country. In that time, the factories…and those people…They simply didn't live, but survived. They didn't pay a salary. Many were just dismissed. But he was a good mechanic and in a good division so they kept him a long time. What did they do during that time? From time to time there was suddenly some work. They paid them symbolically. They lived on that or they worked on the side. How does a mechanic or welder work on the side? Well, for example they ask him to make a fence, a fence. When they bury a person, we have that iron fence around [the plot]. So they made those iron fences. And how did they pay? It wasn't always money. They paid in vodka. So it was with my brother, and with many in this country. So he brings home vodka, cooks with his workmates. At the end of the day they drink. So did he. He began to drink. Wherever, however he could find work. And he fell, he fell.

I asked him if his brother were still alive. "He is gone. Drinking people go early." And: "That was perestroika."

The brother had been respected as a worker under the Soviet state because he had skills to offer. When industry collapsed, people paid for his services with gifts of vodka and he drank this vodka together with his workmates. It was not clear whether his brother died from alcohol-related causes or not. Yuri Ivanovich also spoke of toxic exposure and lung cancer, and I did not push him to specify the cause of death for his deceased brother.

Many of our interviewees made a connection between work and drinking. "And now there is also a breakdown. There is no work. The people are quietly drinking themselves to death because there is no where to work." Or, "It was hard for husbands because they couldn't bring home money. They didn't have work. They had to apply who knows where. That's why it was as if drinking husbands were suffering." Professor Vladislav told me: "Many men are broken, drinking, having lost the meaning of life. They lose their work now." Referring to men who could not provide a woman said,

"Where did they go? Either they drink or they quit life [commit suicide]." And: "And what to do?...Everywhere you go, whatever you say they push you away, and say 'Go away, who needs you?'. He drinks, there isn't another option." Men lose themselves when they lose their ability to provide for others—when they become unneeded. "A lot of [men] felt unneeded, useless, defective." Soviet work was intimately bound to being needed by state and family for Russian men.

Interviewees connected drinking to being unneeded and to the loss of work. I started to wonder if drinking was a means to feel needed, through the concrete practice of offering alcohol to others and the more metaphorical extension of the soul toward others. The fundamental question revolves around whether men turned to drink as an escape, which is what epidemiologists suggest, or whether men turned to drink in order to repair the soul and enact a social practice undergirded by the logic of giving as a way to intervene in the world. When I asked what drinking did for men, though, men and women in Moscow did not have much to say. It may be that what drinking does is resistant to discursive expression and must be experienced in order to be understood. One episode during my fieldwork is suggestive that drinking is related to soul.

Drinking for the soul

On the first day of the 2007 Moscow alcohol policy seminar, a Russian man who did not identify himself stood after a panel on alcohol mortality to make a comment. He began by talking about how hard liquors are referred to as 'spirits' in English. In Russia, he said, drinking was also related to spirit and soul. "It is happiness" he continued, "and

you are not talking about that side of it." His comments, while acknowledged, met with little response. Later I was in on small talk where some of the social scientists commented on the man's ruddy skin tone and insinuated that he might be "one of those"—which I took to mean an alcoholic. Anthropologist Pesmen (2000; 1995) writes about drinking in the city of Omsk during the years 1990 through 1994 where she finds alcohol is for the soul (Pesmen 2000, 176). As one of her informants tells her, "When a Russian has a good drink, you won't find anyone more soulful" (Pesmen 2000, 170). Given that the soul is located between people, a soulful person implies a social person, open to others. Indeed Pesmen's informants describe soulful people as kind and good to sit and talk with (2000, 170). Drinking is related to soul in that it connects individuals.

A separate question is whether drinking connects individuals through the logic of giving, which would make it a social practice that could repair a sense of being needed, particularly for men. Offering someone alcohol is giving, as is giving a toast. Drunks are notoriously generous (Pesmen 1995, 71). Pesmen recalls drinking with a woman who kept giving her gifts. At one point the woman said, "I knew when I'd had a drink I'd think of more things to give!" (2000, 183). It is also true that people, men in particular, negotiated favors through alcohol. Liquor facilitated *blat* relations, either directly or indirectly when used as a gift (Ledeneva 1998; Rivkin-Fish 2005b; Patico 2002).

Drinking for the soul implicates the individual in social practice, thus binding the individual to social structure and providing a sense of order and constraint. Drinking also works to provide a sense of space and freedom.

Drinking and space

Drinking is a social practice which manifests certain structure but suspends other structure, by lifting the constraints ordinarily operative through practices related to family, work, and the state. Men's drinking in Russia is associated with a sense of unbounded space against order.

One man told me that men are the warriors and hunters, the risk takers. "If I am alive or not…" He didn't finish his thought but continued with a story from Pushkin's historical novel *The Captain's Daughter* (1957). When Pugachev, the leader of the Cossack Rebellion under Catherine the Great, is reminded of his impending mortality he recounts the story of an eagle and crow. The eagle asked, "Crow, isn't it unjust somehow that you live three hundred years and I only thirty?" Why is that? The crow said, "Everything depends on diet, on food." The eagle said he would feed on what the crow did and they flew off. The crow found a dead horse and pecked at the decaying flesh. The eagle pecked once, pecked twice, and spit it out, declaring, "It is better to live thirty years and feed on living blood, than three hundred on carrion." This man told me:

> In that is the heart of the matter, of all stories about our men. At the heart of it we end our own lives, with our arrogance, our pretension, our drive somewhere, to certain heights. […] And what is more, it is considered almost culture, if I want to weasel out of something, I must […] sit a bit. Related to this, it isn't a shot, a taste of whisky[33] for example, but by the glassful. We are avid smokers, all of us, and a multitude of other excesses.

Men "weasel out" of their responsibilities through drink. What is more, they escape the banality of their everyday lives through drinking and other excesses. Risk and excess give men the feeling that they can rise above what pulls them down. Russian men crave the

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[33] Here he is probably referring to a perceived Western pattern of drinking—cowboys drinking a shot of whisky.

fresh, the real, and the spontaneous. Like the eagle feeding on living blood, Russian men would rather experience the thrills and extremes of life even if they die young. Feeding on living blood comes at a cost.

At the same time, moments of release into unbounded space are ordinarily held in check by the same stable social structures which they flout. Structure and responsibility demarcate space for spontaneity and excess, and even yield as men push against limits. But the limits do not fully recede. In Soviet times, the drive to excess was limited, to greater or lesser degrees, by the constraints of Soviet society, chief among them responsibility to family and state.

In the early 1990s when the Soviet state was defunct and the contours of the new Russia still hazy, men's risk taking was sufficiently not counterbalanced by their fragile integration in social practices. In the context of a failed state, salary arrears, and unemployment drinking could spin out of control and become excessive. When the Soviet state fell, men turned to drink to experience a sense of society, as well as a sense of power to push against what bound them. Unfortunately, not much bound them. Structures that ordinarily served to limit excessive drinking were weakened. Men pushed further and further into space before finding limits.

Drinking binds people together at the same time as it sets them free. Initially this seems contradictory—a paradox. But if we think of Vasilii's soul, the energetic envelope around the body, the soul allows the self to escape the atomism of the body and venture out into the spiritual space of society. Individuals can push against the borders of the envelope and, in so doing, enlarge their souls.

Needed mothers

In the early 1990s, men struggled to maintain a sense of being needed, but women were more needed than ever in the family. My friend Tatiyana, who took Margarita back to *Novyi Arbat* street after 15 years, explained:

> Because, for a man it is very scary to not be needed. Yes, really scary, because for a woman it is all the same, she is always needed because she is in the family. So, she is in the family and she must care for someone. But a man must feel needed, if you will, his…well, some sort of significance. And when that collapsed…Well, what I mean is my generation, the men of my generation, because those drops in [earnings] […] The working pay of those people fell very low. Why? Because all of industry was ruined. That's why. […] And a person who suddenly sees that not only can he no longer provide for his family, but even for himself, in general, feed himself. He loses himself. And that is why for many men it was a simply a catastrophe. Because of this they began to drink more.

Women's neededness in the family only increased in the early 1990s.

While women do drink in Russia, they are much less likely to drink than men. Women are more likely to sit together over tea in the kitchen. Nonetheless, in the early 1990s women also turned to drink. In fact deaths among women attributable to alcohol dependence and alcohol poisoning registered the largest percentage increase from 1990 to 1994 of all cause of deaths explored by Notzon and colleagues (1998). Tellingly, middle-aged Muscovites considered women drunks an especially ominous sign. Women drunks were more lost than men drunks. Interviewees thought those women must not have children. One woman explained:

> A woman, she doesn't let herself go. More often than not a woman…Well those who have children, those who…I am saying, we are not talking about those…There are those among women. Those are the worst drunks and that's it. But in general, women have children. There are some grandchildren. So a woman already gets something, do you understand?

I let her continue.

> One or two children to raise. I somehow said…I was at the sanatorium and I said that… I said, "Well, something happened and it is as if I am not needed as a mother." Like that. And they said to me, "What are you on about? You say such things!" So, to raise [children], that is overall, that is already over and above. So there. So I calmed down.

At some point in her life, this woman lost the sense that she was needed. But she was a mother and the others at a sanatorium (I assume these were women, but they could have been men) were shocked that she would even entertain the thought that she was not needed. "What are you on about? You say such things!" The others might not have had to say much more. She understood what they meant. Women get something from raising children—a sense of neededness.

What do Russian men do when they confront being unneeded? Russian men do not have the same relationship with their children. Women are responsible for raising children, not men. If they are not able to provide for women or children, and do not feel respected at work, there is not much to prove that they are needed in society. Drinking may be one way men are able to experience a sense of neededness. Drinking in Russia is a culturally sanctioned mode for men to experience, as Tatiyana said, "some sort of significance."

Remedy for the soul

Drinking in the early 1990s was a logical response to what one interviewee called the "death of society." Russian drinking ties individuals together in soulful communion. It is true that drinking can also be destructive. Normative drinking among Russian men is often binge drinking, so even normal drinking behavior, if done frequently enough, will drive up death rates from alcohol poisoning and cardiovascular deaths related to repeat

binging. Drinking may become excessive, unconstrained, without limits. Further, as men increasingly rely on drinking as one of a diminished set of social practices that are soulful, that is social, drinking eventually turns on them to become a sign of separation from society.

Some epidemiologists dismiss the finding that alcohol use is associated with better indicators of reported health, calling it "not plausible" (Bobak et al. 1998). If drinking serves to connect individuals or repairs a sense of neededness, this finding is more than plausible. It is expected. In the early 1990s drinking provided Russian men a sense of being a part of something larger—society—at a time when society itself was in question. Alcohol use is not associated with indicators of psychosocial stress because drinking is what real, soulful Russian men do.

Drinking in Russia during the early 1990s was not primarily an attempt to avoid problems, but rather an attempt to address them, with sometimes tragic consequences. It was not an escape; it was a search—a search for social connectedness. Alcohol in Russia improves men's health—both perceived emotional and physical health—before it ever kills them. Medical anthropologist Mark Nichter considers idioms of distress either "adaptive or maladaptive" (1981, 402). Adaptive idioms express resilience as much as distress. Drinking in Russia is *resilience*, a culturally sanctioned means for men to express their neededness and social significance.

A focus on alcohol as a behavioral risk factor leads to a preoccupation with the individual and away from the larger political economic context. Alcohol is part of the mortality crisis, but the behavior of individuals reflects broader social logics, themselves

reflections of political economy at the local, national, and global levels. In its attempt to identify risk factors, epidemiology strips these factors of their cultural embeddedness.

So why were certain Russians more likely to die in the early 1990s? Was it alcohol use? Social stress? Unemployment? Lack of social norms? Being unneeded? Disempowerment? It was all these and more. It was the death of Soviet society and a sickness in the soul which made the body vulnerable. “The death of society is at first spiritual, then physical.”

Chapter 10

Freedom

"I don't understand what freedom [*svoboda*] is. I don't understand that word."
—interviewee

In the West, many people originally saw the undoing of the Soviet state and the decentralization of the economy as granting political freedom to Russians. "Russia Free" proclaimed Brisbane's *Courier-Mail* after the failed August 1991 coup against Gorbachev (Anderson 1991). A week later *The Washington Times* ran the headline "Russia's Needs Go Beyond Freedom" (Sieff 1991). In December Adelaide's *The Advertiser* cautioned "High Price of Russia's 'Freedom'" Newspaper headlines in 1992 and 1993 echoed the sentiment that Russian freedom came at a cost.

When Soviet bureaucracy and industry unraveled in 1992 and 1993 so did the rules and resources which individuals used to make things happen and exert power. In that sense, when Margarita and Tatiyana say "there is no more of that space" they mean that the order through which the Russian people, the *narod*, had both its identity and its efficacy no longer held. Margarita and Tatiyana, among many other middle-aged Muscovites, did not experience this as freedom. In fact, in the absence of a stable social structure they felt disempowered. The early 1990s was anarchic and disorienting. Especially for the Russian man, with a predilection for extremes and risk, this time was

life-threatening. They were free from the state and free from social networks grounded in the state. Free to die. But this was not freedom.

Not surprisingly, among this older generation, talk about freedom is highly ambivalent. When Sveta asked Lyudmila about freedom she responded "What freedom?" Sveta gave the example of being able to go abroad. "Freedom, yes, now go ahead, wherever you want. Yes, freedom. But how will you go? There is nothing [no money] to go with." "And how do you understand freedom?" Sveta asked. "We don't have freedom, we are now all forgotten." In Russia, freedom is social and is predicated on participation in social practices that give the individual a sense of social relevance—the ability to intervene in the world and make a difference (Giddens 1984). Freedom implies using certain social structures against others.

Western political philosophy defines freedom as either negative or positive (Berlin 1969). Negative freedom is the absence of constraint; positive freedom the ability to act toward self-realization. MacCallum (1967) proposes that freedom is a triadic relationship between constraints, agent, and actions. Thus, freedom is the absence of constraints so that an agent may act. Neoliberal definitions privilege the absence of constraint; while other definitions privilege action, dropping constraint altogether. One such example is the concept of "capability" in Amartya Sen's work (Sen 1985). In a common neoliberal view, constraints on freedom must be external, and intentionally imposed by another agent, thus excluding market forces as constraints on freedom (Carter 2008). The way middle-aged Muscovites spoke of freedom differs from these formulations, and as we have seen the notion of social structure and soul complicate seemingly natural categories such as constraint, agent, and action.

Many Russians define freedom differently than Western political freedom. This type of freedom easily coexisted with the Soviet state. In fact, it was heightened during Soviet times. Sveta, who would have been only ten in 1991, told me, "We used to have such literature and films. Now we are free and nobody has a use for it." Freedom needs constraint to frame it, to give it something to play with, and something to push against. In this analysis freedom is not the absence of constraint so that an agent may act but the presence of constraint so that an agent may act.

Bespredel—freedom without limits

The Russian word *bespredel* literally translates as "without limits." In the Russian-English dictionary it is translated as "license" or "unbridled freedom" (Katzner 1994). When I asked my two young female research assistants to define *беспредéл* they related it to chaos, when there are no laws and when moral norms are unclear—"there are no clear models for what is good and what is bad." *Bespredel* is when people do things that do not fit within legal, moral, or ethical frameworks or norms. "[T]hat is when people do what is good for them and don't consider anything else".

Middle-aged Muscovites mourned the loss of the Soviet frameworks and norms. This is an excerpt from one of Ira's interviews with an older woman.

> Of course it has become, well before under communism, you could say, somehow it was all ordered [*po polochkam*], do you understand? But now it is some sort of license [*bespredel*]. Well, where…and you don't know to whom…Look if something happens, you don't know whom to turn to. You don't know. Well I don't even know how to express it.

Ira started to ask a question: "Well how do you think that…"

> What's to think? I know that now there is unbridled freedom [*bespredel*] from every side […] from every side, wherever you turn, well, how everyone is dismissed [*chto tak raspustit' vsekh liudei*]. Now even adults are not what they once were, and even at work they spit. And they spit on everything, oh! I don't like that. There, I don't like this order. Let there be Stalin or whomever, under Stalin didn't we also live? Well there wasn't such unbridled freedom [*bespredel*] there wasn't.

Po polochkam, which I have loosely translated as "ordered," comes from the root word for shelf, *polka*. But *polka* also has the connotation of compartment or cubbyhole, so *po polochkam* here might be translated as "in a framework." The connotation of compartment or cubbyhole also conveys space. Bounded space, but space nonetheless. Space within order.

This woman thought that the loss of order meant "you don't know whom to turn to." The loss of order disrupts social relations. People are embedded within a partially known political and economic social landscape which enables them to know, again partially, others embedded in that same social landscape. When the framework of order is transformed, people are no longer held by the expected, taken-for-granted structures by which they are known and know other people. Social interactions suffer. There is no one to turn to because it is hard to know who people are. What kind of person are they? What will they do? The framework that normally helps answer those questions is missing.

In the early 1990s, individuals had unbridled freedom [*bespredel*], and space without limits. "Everyone went their own way." They lost what the Soviet state provided, but also the logic of social relations. A taxi driver explained it thus:

> Here is what I want to tell you, in the 1990s they said there was freedom, democracy, but the freedom was bad. The democracy was bad. We don't need that kind. It was, you know it's called 'no limits' [*bespredel*]. Whatever they want, they do. And the main thing, everywhere it was 'no limits,' completely 'no limits.' You know in the nineties I had this impression: that we were all like a dog that had been on a leash [and] then broke away. And everybody…That was how it was: people broke away

> from leashes […] Everyone was off their leashes, everyone. Everyone was fierce to each other. Everyone was dissatisfied because, well, because it was obscure what was happening. First of all, the power of the law wasn't active. The power of the law which should be followed for order, it was gone. It was like that.

I asked him if things were less obscure now.

> Well, people have already cooled down a little, cooled down. They began to think a little. It's like that in my opinion. They began to reflect, began to reflect, what and how. […] They began to put a stay on something.

The fundamental problem in Moscow in the early 1990s was not that Soviet socialism was defunct, but rather that the multiple, diffuse social structures linked to state bureaucracy and economy were undergoing transformation. The rules by which individuals come to know and interact with other individuals were being rewritten. Everyone ran their own way. This was indeed negative freedom, but not in the sense of Western political philosophy. It was negative because it was not freedom.

S*voboda*

Russian-informed considerations of freedom have recently appeared in the literature. *Svoboda*, or the most common Russian translation for freedom, comes from the root word *svoi* (self/ours).

> [I]ts etymological load is…telling. Its Indo-European root is *se- or *sue, the same root that forms the term for the social category, "svoi," or "one's own." Svoboda's linguistic burial grounds yield symbolism that takes us far from [sic] Western sense of the term for anarchical, self-centered acts. This freedom is one that is seemingly rooted in society and social intercourse. (Paxson 2005, 96)

According to Caroline Humphrey, in medieval times *svoboda* meant something akin to "the security and well-being that result from living amongst one's own people"; "an

agglomeration of practices of our own way of life" (Humphrey 2007, 2). "It suggests an image of a social kind of freedom, one that was not centred on the singular individual" (Humphrey 2007, 2). Russian freedom implies social belonging and participation, a place among the *narod*. As long as the *narod* can act in ordered spaces—both through and against the institutions of authority—the *narod* experiences freedom—"the blessed sensation of existing 'freely,' adjacent to non-freedom" (Humphrey 2007, 3).

Living amongst one's own people, though, relies on constraint and restraint. One interviewee explained:

> It doesn't mean, of course, that freedom is everything permitted, everything. No, I don't think like that. Above all there should be some sort of own internal censure so that it [lies] in rational limits. In limits so that my freedom does not become bondage for someone.

Another said, "Freedom is responsibility. You answer [for others]." In *From Under the Rubble*, Solzhenitsyn proclaims, "Freedom is self-restriction! Restriction of the self for the sake of others!" (Solzhenitsyn 1981, 136). Freedom must involve structure and constraint if it is social.

Volia

Russians also use the word *volia* to express another variant of freedom. According to Humphrey, "Volia is sensation, emotion, and action. It is both the conscious willing and the active exercise of boundless release, something that one experiences away from society or any kind of limitation. It is direct and unpretentious" (2007, 6). But because of these qualities *volia* is a threat to society and to the soul, which is located in society. "It is not just that the volia of another person may be harmful to one's self, it is that the psychic

consequences of unrestrained volia are likely to be destructive to the very person holding it" (2007, 6).

After I had known Ivan awhile, he asked if I would visit some of his English classes to chat with his students. At the end of these classes, I asked the students to write, anonymously, the answer to three questions. One of the questions was "What, in your opinion, is freedom (*svoboda*)?" One young man wrote this:

> Real freedom is when a person has lost absolutely everything, when he already has nothing to lose. A free person doesn't fear death because it is inevitable. He doesn't depend on anything. I have arrived at this based on my personal experience. Here is the model of a person not free: choose work, family, choose a car, choose a television, a refrigerator, furniture, choose good health and sport, etc. A free man does not choose.

In the margin next to an asterisk he wrote, in English, "see 'Fight Club.'"

Fight Club is a 1996 novel by Chuck Palahniuk, later turned into a cult film about secret male fight clubs which evolve into an anti-consumerist, anarchic, terrorist organization. In the book freedom is glossed as "losing all hope" (Palahniuk 1999, 14). At the same time, the book is about male belonging. Men fight each other as part of the club. The fight club is a society of men united against the System. Together these men flout the constraints consumer society would impose. The student wrote that "a free man does not choose." Indeed, each of the choices he lists—work, family, car, television, refrigerator, health, sport—is a surrender to the structures of consumer capitalism. Conformity is disguised as free choice, but each choice serves to further entrap individuals in prevailing political economic arrangements.

This young man's vision of freedom is about risk and death. It is not beholden to society. Boym writes, "*volia* is usually a liberation from social ties" (2010, 78-79). It is "for oneself only" (2010, 79). In its most dangerous form *volia* is freedom to act against

the self. This is so because an important part of the self is located in society in social practices which serve to connect people. In the words of one young man studying English in Stupino, “A free person doesn’t fear death.”

Freedom in constraint

In Margaret Paxson’s beautiful ethnography of a Russian village, informants are nostalgic for freedom, in a way that makes little sense for Westerners. “During the time of Stalin, we lived better than we live now. Everyone was free” (2005, 96). Nielsen’s ethnography of St. Petersburg in the early 1980s highlights an authority-freedom duality. In his account freedom demands an anchor in authority, or rather multiple anchors in different forms of authority. Like the layers of an onion, the anchors start with the state and proceed inward towards the intimate circle of friends and relatives where moral responsibility reigns. At its purest, freedom is individual and “a dissolving, anarchic force from within, undermining all order and self-restraint” (Nielsen 2006, under “C. The Free Outpouring of the Soul”). Authority protects against this anarchic freedom (Nielsen 2006, under “D. Faith and the Weakness of Authority”). In Boym’s evocative *Another Freedom* she writes, “Freedom is only possible…with concern for boundaries” (2010, 4). Each of these accounts introduces some element of order and constraint to the concept of freedom—Stalin, authority, boundaries. Boym addresses the relationship between order and freedom. She likens freedom to an adventure: “it explores new borders but never erases or transcends them. Through adventure we can test the limits but also navigate—

more or less successfully—between convention and invention, responsibility and play" (5). Freedom is space for the unknown, the possible, the "what if."

Boym's definition of freedom as adventure resonates with the experiences and memories of middle-aged Muscovites. Boym writes, "Freedom is only possible…with concern for boundaries" (2010, 4). She likens freedom to an adventure: "it explores new borders but never erases or transcends them. Through adventure we can test the limits but also navigate—more or less successfully—between convention and invention, responsibility and play" (5). Drawing on political philosopher Hannah Arendt's work on freedom, she too uses the analogy of the public stage where freedom is a "cocreation" between individual and world. Freedom depends on both human agency and the "architecture of the public stage" (10). "The best theater redefines the boundaries of the stage through movement and action; it transports us back and forth, beyond and inside, but it never obliterates the stage" (21). A stage is not an infinite space, but one with a frame. For Arendt, freedom is social action which begets something new. Using the metaphor of the stage, freedom is improvisation. Thus freedom is spontaneous and unpredictable. It requires some space and indeterminacy as well as a frame. It is living in the "land of miracles." A miracle, writes Arendt, is "something which could not be expected."(Arendt 2006, 168).

For middle-aged Muscovites, individuals are free when they have the space (*prostor*) to act through and against structural constraint. Structural constraint is a necessary condition because certain constraining structures are used to bend and circumvent other constraining structures. This is the Russian sensation of freedom. In Soviet society, such space was found within the order of the state. Social relations in this

space were collectively efficacious at pushing against the power of the state. In this analysis freedom is not the absence of constraint, but the presence of constraint. Constraint enables freedom by providing resources and rules to manipulate. If there are no rules to wield and to bend, there is no freedom.

Spiritual freedom

In *The Brothers Karamazov* the monk Elder Zosima considers the monastic life as a source of freedom. "People may ridicule the vows of obedience, fasting, and prayer, yet these are the only way to attain true freedom…Who is more likely to conceive a great idea and serve it: the isolated rich man or the man *freed* from the tyranny of habits and material goods?" (Dostoevsky 2003, 420) Dostoevsky's novel *The House of the Dead* is the story of a prisoner sentenced to ten years in a Siberian penal colony for killing his wife. It was written after Dostoevsky himself spent four years in prison camp in Siberia for his involvement in an intellectual association. The prisoner in the novel thinks, "In consequence of our day dreaming and our long divorce from it, freedom appeared to us here, somehow freer than real freedom, that exists in fact, in real life" (Dostoevsky 1985, 355). To a Westerner, the monastery and the prison are unexpected places for freedom.

Dostoevsky, along with other Russian philosophers, interpret freedom as an inner, spiritual state that cannot be quenched by confinement. In fact, freedom is only truly known in confinement. This is because confinement bears down on freedom, putting it under pressure, and distilling it into something richer, truer, freer. In turn this "freer freedom" puts pressure on the borders around it, bending them back. The very friction

between freedom and the order which delineate its space serve as proof that freedom exists. I am free because I struggle with what binds me. I am free because I recognize the frame around my life. I cannot remove it, but I can nudge it further away, at least momentarily. What at first glance seems utter nonsense—that freedom can reside in the monastery and the prison—makes more sense if freedom is found in the relationship between order and space.

The Western account of freedom and constraint is different. In Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995) the monastery is the birthplace of dominion. In the monastery, disciplinary methods such as cloister, cell, exercise, and timetable render docile bodies without the use of force or violence. Modern institutions such as prisons, barracks, schools, factories, and hospitals all inherit methods of monastic discipline. Disciplinary methods enclose and partition space, but the space is so finely partitioned that individuals occupy their own space. The space they are granted is not a space of collectivism, indeterminacy, possibility, and spontaneity—the soulful space in between people—but a space of individualism, observation, control, and rank—the space of a single physical body. In Foucault's account, freedom hardly exists at all. If it does exist it is experienced by exercising existing disciplinary techniques. Freedom does not challenge constraint as much as maintain constraint. Constraint, therefore, determines the limits of freedom and is a threat to freedom.

The prison of the individual

Some older Muscovites think of life as narrower, not broader now. Some of this is due to poverty and inequality, but some of it is due to capitalism's insistence on a different sense of freedom, one in which dominant political-economic logics colonize individual bodies and desire. Some describe younger generations as different and their lives more narrow. Professor Vladislav told me:

> Now I look at the young new generation. They strive more for comfort, for stability. They want a quiet life. In that sense the mentality is becoming more Western, more modern. They simply want to organize their small individual life and big projects don't worry them.

As Sveta and I sat on the park bench with Valentina, our first interviewee, she spoke about Russian's wide nature and emotional richness. "For us Europeans, some of them…somehow narrow, [going] from this to that." And she thought European children were more obedient than Russian children. "Freedom and democracy," she said, and paused. "Still in Russia these things are somehow never simple."

For many middle-aged Muscovites, individual freedom is an oxymoron. Freedom lies in society, in the space of the soul outside of the body. A monastery is a collective of monks; even a prison is a collective of prisoners. Dostoevsky thought that true freedom was no stranger to the monastery or the prison. Perhaps he might also have thought that a true prison is no stranger to individualism. Individualism is a prison of the soul.

Structure and agency

At a workshop on post-Soviet mortality in Kiev in October 2006, I overheard an exchange between two sociologists, one American and one Russian. The American had presented a paper which used Max Weber's concepts of life choices and life chances, drawing a distinction between agency and structure. The Russian sociologist made the comment that those born in poor families did not have many choices. The American responded, "Sometimes structure is more important". The Russian paused and said that structure was not operating for those in the lowest socioeconomic statuses.

It became clear that structure meant something entirely different to these two social scientists. The Russian gave examples of public policy and attitudes of the population as structure. The American spoke of gender, class, and race. According to the Russian, social structures, located in both society and the individual, enabled agency. According to the American, social structures, all embodied, constrained agency. The American defined structure negatively whereas the Russian defined it positively. The conversation reflects different conceptual relations between freedom and constraint. In the one telling structure is manipulated by individuals. Structure may impose on individuals but it does not penetrate their bodies. In the West structure manipulates individuals. Structure fashions individuals' bodies and desires in its own image.

Russian and Western thinking about agency and structure both shed light on the human experience. However, there are important differences in the Russian and Western idea of freedom. For Russians, freedom is rooted in society. In the early 1990s the fall of the Soviet state compromised a sense of society and a sense of freedom.

The generation of older Muscovite will soon pass away. Fewer will be nostalgic for the space (*prostor*) that existed in Soviet times; they will find space in the structure of Russian capitalism. People will learn the new rules. As long as Russians are brought further into the fold of global capitalism, they will be sufficiently constrained and restrained. And, for that, they will be less likely to die untimely deaths.

Chapter 11

Conclusion

Russians need constraint in order to feel free. This is so because only by pushing against constraint—bending or breaking the rules, playing with the System—Russians have a sense of nudging the weight of culture and history. Constraints are necessary to be a part of society, but, by playing with those constraints, Russians show that they know what binds them and that they have some power to loosen the binds.

Americans perceive freedom differently. Freedom is being unbound, free to do whatever one wants—unencumbered by government, unencumbered by society. There are two ways to understand these differences in the idea of freedom. The first would be to assert that freedom may be a universal ideal, but there are cultural differences in the experience of freedom. In this sense, feeling free reflects differences in the relationship between the individual and society in Russia and America. Another way to understand these differences is that the basic aspects of freedom are universal, but cultures recognize and emphasize certain aspects of freedom over others. In this sense, both constraint and agency are implicated—they are two sides of a coin—, but Russians see constraint and Americans see agency. I do not think that these two possibilities—freedom as particular or universal—necessarily contradict one another. Senses of freedom could exist along a continuum. At some distance, depending on the observer, they will look like two different things.

Seeing freedom as universal or particular, however, has practical and political implications. I might conclude this dissertation with a classically ethnographic point: concepts that are taken-for-granted truths are actually products of the cultural configurations we live by. The experience of freedom is fundamentally different for Russians and Americans. America's self-proclaimed role as the guardian of freedom around the world is less about freedom and more about the exportation of a certain configuration of American ideas and practices. Fighting for others' freedom is actually fighting for others' acceptance of American political economy. This is one conclusion of this dissertation.

Another possible conclusion assumes that aspects of freedom are universal, although differently weighted. This, I think, is the more sophisticated argument, although it is vulnerable to co-option by those who believe that certain people are freer than others and should be liberated. This is not what I mean or intend. This conclusion also has a classically ethnographic point: understanding how others live their lives helps us to see more clearly how we live our own. Russians have an understanding of freedom that points to constraint. Older Russians speak about being free in the time of Stalin and unbridled freedom, *bespredel*, in post-Soviet Russia. Perhaps the only reason they were so clear and forceful on this point was because they understood there was another sense of freedom, a freedom that, ironically, can be imposed through neoliberal economic reform.

With the knowledge that more than one account of freedom exists, they endeavored to express their own understanding and experience of freedom. "Freedom is responsibility"; "We don't have freedom, we are now all forgotten"; "We work day and

night. What kind of freedom is that?" Or they stopped trying: "I don't understand what freedom is. I don't understand that word." They saw the ridiculousness of a freedom where all individuals are purportedly free to do whatever they like. They said, "there will be freedom in the grave." And, laughing, "freedom is only our dream." What might we learn about ourselves from these statements? Our own freedom is also grounded in constraint. Our sense of freedom depends on being bound by certain norms and logics which enable collective action in society.

Toward the end of my fieldwork Ira, Sveta, and I started to interview young men and women about fertility decisions. As a way of familiarizing Ira with the questions I was interested in, I asked her to interview me. Over tea in her kitchen, the interview evolved into a conversation, with both of us asking and answering questions. The topic of housing came up, as it did in many of the interviews on fertility. She asked if James and I owned a house. "Yes," I said, and then said, "The bank and we both own the house." We talked about mortgages. "How long will you have to pay the bank?" she asked. "Thirty years." She gasped. "That's like slavery."

Owning a house is part of the American dream. Some of us, lucky enough to have a house, do not even think twice about saying we are homeowners even as we pay the bank every month. Homeownership is even part of our ideas on freedom. Owning your own house is having a place where we can do our own thing. In our own house we are free from the government, free from a landlord, free from meddlesome neighbors. And yet owning a house is also responsibility and constraint.

The American dream is a beguiling bit of ideology. As we do things like buy a house, we feel we are getting ahead in life and buying a bit more freedom. Yet if we

accept the logic that people with more money are freer to do what they like and embark on that quest, we are increasingly embroiled in the consumer capitalist logic undergirding our own society. We are increasingly constrained to live in certain ways and pursue certain goals. In a society where money is supposed to buy freedom, it follows that people who do not succeed are less free. They are, we are told in countless ways, fettered by their own fear and their own indolence. This belies the fact that people have different access to structures which enable them to succeed in a consumer capitalist society. In addition to structural violence (Farmer 1999), there is a violence in lack of structure.

Fortunately for some and unfortunately for others, ideology and political economy penetrate bodies. When we further entangle ourselves in the dominant logic of our society, at least up until a certain point, there are psychological and material benefits which improve our bodily health. Loosening the binds that tie us to others and to dominant institutional structures in our society sometimes comes at a bodily cost, especially if we feel that unboundedness was not our choice. This was true of a certain generation of Muscovites during the early 1990s.

Being needed

One concrete example of Russians pushing against constraint and exercising freedom was how individuals allocated favors and resources through their personal contacts. They were able to siphon from larger resource flows in society, altering a given course of events, game-ing the System. This conferred a sense of power and agency. In Giddens' language individuals intervened in the world and made a difference.

People were able to bend social structure because they were constrained by social structure. Work was the principal means by which Soviet citizens were incorporated into the state. Yet work was also the means by which Soviet citizens circumvented the state. At work, Russians had personal connections and access to resources and services. Work determined what people had to offer others. Someone in the Soviet bureaucracy could arrange permission to build a *dacha*, but could not provide a good cut of meat. A friendly butcher could set aside a good cut of meat, but not construction supplies. People were needed for different reasons.

Sociability is tied to political economic structure. In Soviet times, social relations reflected the fact that power lay in allocation, not accumulation. Individuals could allocate favors and resources through their personal contacts. The key was not that they personally had resources to distribute or favors to grant, nor that they accrued resources or secured favors through their contacts. Often they merely made this happen for other people. Giving was more important than getting. Those that gave to others were needed people in a shortage economy. They themselves were in demand.

Being unneeded communicates a sense of irrelevance and disempowerment. Middle-aged Muscovites said that nobody needed them. They asked, rhetorically, “Who needs us?” They were unneeded by others around them and they were unneeded by the state. “I became unnecessary to the state.” Being needed by the state was tied to work. “People sat in one place for 30 years and suddenly they kicked them. They said you aren’t needed anywhere.” And, referring to the state’s workers: “They ended up as if they weren’t in demand at all.”

Men in particular were unneeded by the state and by others around them. Work, for the first time in their lives, was no longer certain. In the family, they were unable to fulfill their role as breadwinner. This was particularly true in the context of hyperinflation, salary arrears, forced retirements, and layoffs in the early 1990s. Women might not have been needed by the state, but they were needed, as always, in the family. "For a woman it is all the same, she is always needed […] She must care for someone."

Being needed or being unneeded is a set expression that opens a window on Russian agency, sociability, and gender. Like the Russian sense of freedom, neededness may also tell us something about the human condition. Humans need to feel they have something to offer others. What we have to offer may vary, but we offer things in order to impact the lives of others and secure others' acknowledgement of our own selves. Developmental psychologist Philippe Rochat writes that "humans experience themselves through the eyes of others (Rochat 2009, 16). He believes that the human preoccupation with reputation is a by-product of our fear of being rejected and ostracized. The foundation of sociality is a drive for mutual recognition, to be "visible rather than invisible, recognized rather than ignored" (Rochat 2008, 308). Giving something to another proves that we matter; it is proof of our existence in the lives of others. Giving eases existential angst, and there is evidence that it is good for bodily health.

Generation of victors, generation of losers

When I first developed the proposal for this research, one of the critical comments I received was that I would only be speaking to "the losers," or those who had lost out. At

the time I thought that things were not so simple. Indeed, one cold October day I stood along the heavily policed route of a youthful anti-Putin demonstration. As National Bolshevik Party (NBP) youth chanted angry nationalist slogans (Russia without Putin; Glory to the nation, death to enemies; Russia—all the rest is nothing; Nation-homeland-socialism; Nation and freedom) an older woman, perhaps seventy, saw me taking pictures and came over. “They don’t know sorrow. They didn’t live through it. They have a voice but they don’t have experience.”

It remains true that older Muscovites overwhelmingly spoke of their losses. Even those who were happy to see the end of the Soviet state were not thrilled with what had replaced it. Moreover, in the early 1990s the majority of the Russian population suddenly found themselves living in poverty. It is naïve to think that there were many winners in this context. Almost everyone lost something in the early 1990s. All Russians were “losers” in that sense. Young Russians also mourn the loss of a radiant future. Ira openly admitted being envious of the security her mother described—a job, an apartment, education, and healthcare. She worried over her future and the ability to provide for a child.

When I told a colleague about the “losers” comment, she wondered what was wrong with talking to losers. In fact, anthropologists have long attended to those with less power, both for political and practical reasons. But during my year in Russia I came to see the label itself as problematic. “Losers” implies a game with clear and straightforward rules. This was decidedly not the case during the early 1990s in Moscow. There were no clear rules. There was no game to play.

This generation began life as victors—"our fathers were victorious and we are the generation of victors." Western Russia was devastated by the war, but Russia had secured the allied victory. These older Muscovites were born into hardship and famine. They made sacrifices to rebuild their country and regarded its scientific and technological achievements in the 1950s and 1960s with youthful awe. With war as the backdrop, their lives were on a trajectory toward a more radiant future, if not *the* radiant future. Things steadily improved until at least the 1970s. "Yes, we really believed in that radiant future. We believed, we believed." "We believed in [socialism]—really believed." When the Soviet state crumbled, so did the dreams of their youth.

Death

Excess mortality in Russia during the early 1990s was but the biological endpoint of political-economic processes which have psychosocial consequences. History and culture must be the starting points of a holistic analysis of the crisis—certainly the history and culture of Russia, but also the history and culture of world political-economy. This includes post World War II economic expansion, the rise of neoliberalism, structural adjustment programs in Latin America, the collapse of the Soviet empire, and "shock therapy" in Eastern Europe and Russia. Shock therapy was a specific historical moment. In that sense, we all bear some responsibility for what happened in Russia in the early 1990s because we were all part of a global system which touted the unregulated free market.

In Moscow where people had fewer kin, social relations were structured by the Soviet state through work. It was the means by which people understood and interacted with others. The workplace, of course, was a site of camaraderie. But people interacted with others outside the workplace using work as a framework for social interaction. People were needed for different reasons. In the early 1990s wealth, not work, became the currency of value. Now everyone needed the same thing, and not everyone was needed.

Epidemiology identifies risk factors—most commonly of individuals, but sometimes of places. The epidemiological question is: who is at risk? Applied to the Russian mortality crisis, this question becomes slightly perverse. What made economic shock therapy so harmful in Russia? Responsibility for the crisis moves away from shock therapy to Russian society. What is it about Russia? Economic shock therapy is normalized, and the Russian mortality crisis exoticized. In terms of cardiovascular disease, it was Russia's lack of social capital or civil society. In terms of alcohol, it was the Russian predilection for drink. But a lack of social capital, if that is the right term for it, was a result of economic shock therapy, not a Soviet legacy. Yes, Russian men have always drunk. But they have not always died at such high rates from alcohol-related causes. Something drove them to drink more harmfully. Alcohol use was not an escape from stress as much as a search for recognition and limits. Ethnography throws light on the epidemiology of mortality.

Life

I, too, began this research with that perverse question: why did Russians die? I found I could not answer the question without asking other questions first. How do Russians live? What things make life worth living for Russians? This dissertation deals with the paradoxical desire for space and order—"two opposing thoughts or propositions" (Nuckolls 1998, 273) and with freedom (*svoboda*)—"a more imposing, illuminating, life-related, or provocative insight into truth" (Nuckolls 1998, 273). Freedom resolves the paradox of space and order. Freedom (*svoboda*) is space (*prostor*, the expanse of possibility) within order—the constraint of society.

Freedom is the human condition. We all come into the world and life is full of possibilities. Society harnesses that to create social beings. Most of the time, we follow the script and perform our roles. Once in a while we improvise. When we improvise, we set something in motion, with unpredictable results. Political philosopher Hannah Arendt writes of "automatic processes," natural, cosmic, and historical, by which we are driven and, yet, "within which and against which [man] can assert himself through action" (Arendt 2006, 67). This is freedom.

Coda

One rainy, cold spring day Anya and I decided to go to the State Tretyakov Gallery. In one of the rooms, I stopped in front Isaak Illich Levitan's *Above Eternal Peace* (1894), a landscape painting. The painting seems enormous (It is 1.5 by 2.1 meters.) From a bird's eye view, gray water stretches towards the horizon, where it meets the sky—dark and gray with thick clouds. The sky lightens slightly above the

clouds, but the overwhelming impression is of a vast, gray expanse. In the foreground, on a green hill "straining forward" (The State Tretyakov Gallery website), is a cemetery marked by a scattering of Orthodox crosses, a cluster of trees bent in the wind and, partially behind the trees, a wooden church with an onion dome. In one small window of the church is an orange glow. The lake and sky are dramatic, and the church seems so small and insignificant, except for that glow. The text on the gallery's website refers to the "world's mysterious incomprehensibility."

> It is only the cliff, straining forward as it does, with a wooden church on top, that provides evidence of the human soul, fragile but full of faith, being present in the world. The confrontation between the human spirit and the infinity of the creation is represented in the picture on an epic, universal scale. (The State Tretyakov Gallery website)

As James and I were preparing to leave Moscow, our friend Sergei from the English club gave James a beautiful book of Russian art. James mentioned Levitan's painting and together they found it in the book. James said, "It almost captures how big Russia is." That is the conversation where Sergei told James that Siberia was the only place in Russia where one could be free. I did not think much of it at the time, but I have thought a lot of it since.

Levitan captures the dialectic of Russian *svoboda*: the vast expanse (*prostor*) and the collective (*sobornost'*). The Russian word *sobor* refers both to a cathedral, the external walls of institutional order, and the assembly, or the interpersonal order. Without the *sobor*, space and freedom are boundless and dangerous. Freedom needs constraint to make it meaningful, powerful, and safe.

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